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No. 4.

SUNNY SIDE SERIES.

WHICH SHALL IT BE?

BY

Mrs. M. B. W. PARRISH.

J. S. OGILVIE
Publisher.
57 ROSE STREET,
NEW YORK.

WHICH SHALL IT BE?

OR,

Through Great Tribulations.

BY

MRS. M. B. W. PARRISH.

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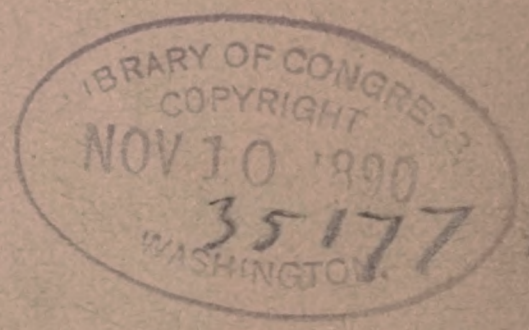

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INTRODUCTION.

WITH great timidity I place this little volume before the cold, critical public. I cannot presume to believe that it will make for itself prominence in the world of literature, but that it may gain a slight foothold I dare to hope.

With intense pleasure I have worked upon its pages, never for a moment losing sight of the fact that its influence upon the young must be for good or ill. If some time I may know that through its perusal some one has been led into a better life, I will have realized my highest ambition.

THE AUTHOR.

To

MY PRECIOUS MOTHER,

AROUND WHOSE MEMORY CLINGS THE SWEETEST AND

TENDEREST RECOLLECTIONS OF MY LIFE,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME

IS

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

WHICH SHALL IT BE?

OR,

THROUGH GREAT TRIBULATIONS.

CHAPTER I.

"GOOD-BY, Morgan, old fellow. I believe I do envy you this delightful seclusion, after all. Don't forget your promise." The words were spoken hurriedly as Morgan Preston reached his hand from the car window for a last hearty grasp from his friend, Philip Martin, just as the train was leaving the city of B.

They were college chums, and this was their first separation for two years. Both had finished their collegiate course, and while Philip Martin slowly wended his way back among the intricate crossings of the city to his father's law office, Morgan Preston was speeding to his home in B. County. The train came thundering along through pleasant rural villages, past smoky furnaces and and noisy mills, now through a wild ravine, and now a stretch of fertile country, green fields and waving forests. He watched the ever-varying landscape as the train sped swiftly along, for after the first casual glance given to the other occupants of the car, when he first entered it, he scarcely noticed them. There was no familiar face among them. two or three old gentlemen absorbed in the papers; a trio

middle-aged, deep in the mysteries of a political discussion; a few bright-faced school-girls lending color to the occasion, and a lady dressed in gray, looking so "settled" and prim, that one would instinctively notice her hands to see if she had brought her knitting. But they only clasped a small black, travelling satchel, and judging from her staid appearance, one might suppose she would travel on to the uttermost parts of the earth. Then there was a plain-faced matron with a cross baby that divided its attention between the bright ribbon on the lady's bonnet and a liberal slice of gingerbread, with which she tried to attract him. Young Preston took in the situation at a glance, and then allowed the beautiful panorama that was passing just outside the window to engage his undivided attention—that and his busy thoughts. As regards his personal appearance (one must naturally feel a curiosity in this direction), he was undeniably handsome. Tall, broad-shouldered, well-built, a massive head, florid complexion, dark blue eyes, *very* dark, almost black sometimes, and wavy masses of auburn hair, not parted in the middle, nor behind, nor brought down effeminately upon the forehead, but thrown carelessly back, from a broad full brow. All this was noticeable to an observer, for the white leghorn resting so lightly on his head did duty occasionally as a fan, this being the month of June, hot, dusty Summer-time. After a few hours, when the conductor opened the door of the coach and called out "Waverly Hall!" Morgan Preston's journey by rail was at an end; and as the train steamed up to the station and stopped, the place looked quite familiar to the young man who had left it four years ago. It was but the work of a few minutes to transfer himself and his trunks to the cumbersome stage, and after a jolting ride of a few miles through a rugged, romantic

country, Morgan Preston was set down at his father's gate. It was an old-fashioned country farm-house set back from the road a little distance, abundantly shaded with trees, their thick, cool-looking branches continually inviting one to quiet and repose. The halting of the old red stage at the gate was not unnoticed nor unexpected, for, with a face expressive of glad welcome, an elderly, sweet-faced woman hurried down the path to meet her son, saying (in just such a sweet voice as one would expect her to possess):

"Morgan, my son, I am *so* glad to have you home again."

"And I am just as glad as you are, mother," he replied, "for everything looks so comfortable here. I shall revel in this coolness to my heart's content. Where is father?

"Sit here on the porch, dear, and take this fan. I'll call him."

Father was hallooed to at the barn and requested to "come in," as "Morgan had come."

He needed no second invitation—this jolly, good-natured old gentleman, wearing an habitual smile on his sunny, weather-browned face. A cordial shaking of hands followed, and "Bless me, boy, but I declare you've grown wonderfully since I set eyes on you last. What a capital hand you'll make in the harvest-field! Ha, ha!" and the old gentleman rubbed his hands together in his own peculiar, gleeful way.

"I have already decided upon a programme for harvest-time," was the son's laughing rejoinder. "You and I are to sit in the shade, and see to it that the work is carried on scientifically, keeping all the while at a respectful distance. Don't you think that is a more excellent way?"

"Well, well, you lazy young scamp. Why, you'd

ruin your old father, boy!" and the old gentleman gave his over-wrought feelings vent again in another outburst of laughter.

But the mother said: "I cannot spare you, son, even to sit in the shade with father, for a good while yet. I shall weary you with questions, I've no doubt, for there are so very, *very* many things for you to tell me; but you look so manly, dear, not like the boy we sent away, how do I know that some presumptuous miss has not already laid siege to your heart!"

"Then let me assure you, my little mother," accompanied with a boyish gesture of affection, "that you reign within my heart without a rival. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly, my son," she said, while her beaming face spoke more than her words.

Ah! well may she smile and look happy, for rarely does the man bring back to his mother the same loving heart that the ardent schoolboy carries away. In a little while she left them to prepare the evening meal.

"Have you no servant, mother?" asked Morgan, as they sat around the table soon after—a table filled with all procurable good things, gotten up in honor of the son's return.

"No, my dear."

"That is not right. I shall see to it that you have one hereafter."

She only smiled and said: "I do not need one, dear."

Mr. Preston was by no means wealthy—only a farmer in unencumbered circumstances; but he and his good wife had talked it over when Morgan was a boy, and had concluded, like many other parents, that there was "something *in* that boy;" and they de-

termined to educate him, and, as his father expressed it, "give him a chance to make his living without digging and delving all his days." Morgan was an only child, and had been tenderly reared; but he did not know how his parents economized to gratify his ambition and their own, nor how many extra days of labor they had imposed upon themselves that, had it not been for his education, would have been accomplished by hirelings. And the outlay at home, in other respects, had been curtailed that he might dress as well as any other student at the college, and have his pocket-money, too. Will his knowledge and accomplishments repay them for their sacrifices and anxiety? The sequel, we trust, will show.

CHAPTER II.

"STELLA! Stella!" called Farmer McMurray's wife as she stood in the doorway, shading her eyes with, her hand. "Put up that book and come here this minute."

"Yes, mother," answered a young girl, apparently about eighteen, who was resting in the shade of a clump of trees near the house, deeply absorbed in a book. It was not a novel upon which she was so intent, but a time-worn English history, rich with the exploits of kings and queens, the rise of some and the downfall of others. She rose at once and followed her mother into the house.

"Take the big pitcher, and go fetch a turn of water for father; then go hunt some fresh eggs, and beat up a cake in short order." And in the same breath this notable housewife spoke sharply, but good-naturedly,

to the colored woman: "Fan, you hurry up with that churning."

Stella did as she was bidden, and, as the spring was near by, she did not consume much time with the "turn of water," and before her father had finished the refreshing draught she was off to the barn after eggs. Soon she came in with the required number, and, addressing her mother, said: "Now, will you oversee this, mother, or do you leave it all to me?"

"P'raps I'd better, as I want it oncommon nice. It's to be a pound cake. Get your ingrediencies all ready. Did you know Morgan Preston had come home?"

"Yes, mother."

"Now break nine eggs in this 'ere bowl. He's come home for good, I reckon."

"I expect so."

"His mother's always been mighty easy on him. Jest wait till I roll this sugar. I suppose she will be wuss now than ever. Jest a pound; there, that's it."

"They say he is very dutiful."

"Yes—and the same of butter. He ought to be good to the old folks; they've done enough for him. Now put in them other things and the flour. He's a nice looking chap. Beat it well."

Now, while Stella McMurray is beating her cake and her mother's opinion of Morgan Preston all up together, we will steal a few moments to describe the situation. The Prestons and McMurray's are near neighbors, owning adjoining farms; hence Mrs. McMurray's intimate knowledge of them. And to-day she is expecting a half-dozen city boarders; hence this hurry and preparation. They were all strangers, coming to the country to be fed and made comfortable.

Mrs. McMurray's family consisted of four boys and

one daughter, Stella being the youngest. Stella was not what a fastidious eye would pronounce pretty, yet there was something so pleasing and attractive about the girl that she was everybody's favorite; and although she was rather diminutive in stature, there was something very dignified in her bearing. Her complexion was fair, with cheeks whose color was constantly coming and going, eyes dark, bright and expressive, and hair so naturally curly that she had ceased to try to wear it like other people. In point of education she was superior to most of her neighbors. Her parents had given her all the advantages that the seminary in an adjacent town could supply, and she was still a student under her own tutorship. She was very much petted by her four big brothers, her father called her the finest girl in the county, and her mother was immensely proud of "our Stella." "There now, my girl, you can go and fix up a little; I dare say they'll be here before long. Did you red up the rooms?"

"Yes mother. The rooms are in order."

It was well that Stella "fixed up" as soon as she did, for she had no sooner donned her cool, pretty organdy, than the stage stopped at the gate, and deposited its burden of humanity and trunks. First came a fat, good-natured looking elderly lady, who introduced herself as Mrs. Elton, and a portly gentleman near her as her husband. Then there was an invalid lady, Mrs. Morrison, with her niece, Miss Ross, as an attendant. Then a dandified young fellow, who was introduced as Mr. Todhunter, bowing profoundly in acknowledgment of the introduction, carrying a gold-headed cane, and looking all about him for a dog, for he doubtless believed that the country was full of them. Last of all, a fine-looking young man stepped out, and lifted his

hat, as his mother said: "This is my son Harry, Miss McMurray." She politely ushered them into the house, had their baggage carried up, and showed them into their respective apartments at once.

"How do you think you will like them, Sis?" asked one of her brothers, when they were alone.

"Oh, very well," she replied; "young Mr. Elton especially."

"Take care, Stel," said brother George, the eldest of the group, "these city fellows play the mischief with girls' hearts sometimes." She only laughed a musical little laugh, and glanced up at him, as much as to say, "Never fear; their own are not always impregnable."

It was a pleasant party that gathered around the table soon after. The host and hostess, with Stella and her four brothers, healthy, stalwart, fine-looking young men, and the boarders.

"Now, friends," said Mr. McMurray, after he had asked the blessing, "we are plain country folks here, and we want you to feel at home, help yourselves, and, if things don't suit you, speak, and wife will try to make it right."

There was a murmured "Thank you," and young Mr. Elton replied: "For my part, I am sure I shall not complain. The danger lies in this, sir; I may abuse my privileges."

"Then *I* will have to complain, sir," said the old gentleman, laughing. And so life began with their boarders. And as it progressed, all, save the invalid lady, Mrs. Morrison, were as agreeable as possible. She soon became just as hard to please as the others were easy. She was peevish and irritable. Her tea was always a little too strong or a little too weak, the toast was too dry or the eggs underdone, and once she ventured to complain that the fowl was tough, when

only three months had passed over its innocent head. Miss Ross was a lady of uncommon forbearance, or she could not have borne this constant fault-finding with everything she did for her Aunt.

She would always apologize to Mrs. McMurray when coming to make her complaints about the fare, which was an every-day occurrence. "Indeed, Mrs. McMurray, I thought the muffins were delightful, but Aunt Emma insists that they are heavy, and told me to ask you to send her a slice of toast. I'm sorry to trouble you. Let me make it."

"You make it? No indeed. You have your hands full without helpin' me. Come, Stella, and make a nice slice of toast for Mrs. Morrison."

"'Tis too bad to give you this unnecessary work, Miss Stella."

"Never mind the work, Miss Ross, I'll try and make it so nice that she can't find fault with it." Miss Ross secretly wondered if anything ever was so nice that Aunt Emma could not find a flaw in it.

The commodious farm-house at Mr. McMurray's could boast of but one real luxury, in the way of furniture, and that was a very superior parlor organ, a first-class instrument in every respect. Stella had developed when at school a decided aptness for music, and when she came home, her father had purchased this organ, obeying his wife's injunction to the letter when she told him, "He must get no mean thing." It was Stella's custom to practice for at least an hour every day; so, a few days after their arrival, supposing that the boarders were in their rooms, she went into the parlor for this purpose. In a few moments the door opened, and young Mr. Elton walked in and said: "Excuse my abruptness, Miss McMurray, but I'm lonesome, and I want companionship."

"And you've come in search of it;" she finished the sentence for him, dropping her hands from the keyboard at the same time, and looking at him smilingly.

"Yes; I'm ready to exclaim: 'O, solitude! where are thy charms?'"

"I was afraid our country would be too tame for you."

"Tame? not at all; at least the people are not, for I find it difficult to make friends with them."

She laughed and replied, "I am sorry we seem so unused to society. But you are independent, Mr. Elton, inasmuch as you brought civilization with you in its most modern type. Where's Mr. Todhunter?"

"Locked in his room, I expect, trying to protect himself from the swarms of insects that he says infest the atmosphere. Ah!" spoken with an air of affectation.

She laughed heartily at his mimicry and said, "Why, the poor fellow hasn't had a taste of rural life yet."

"No. I wish you would take him out and set the dog on him; it would take some of the starch out of him."

"Why, Mr. Elton, what an inhospitable host you would be. Anyone not so thoroughly acquainted with the subject as you and I, would suppose that *you* are the uncivilized one, and not I."

"I'll not dispute the point with you, if you'll undertake to civilize me."

"I'm afraid to accept an undertaking that promises so little success."

He laughed good-humoredly, stroked his moustache, and said after a moment, "I'm to understand that you think the raw material with which you have to deal is of such an inferior quality that your work would

reflect very little credit upon you should you succeed to the very best of your expectations. Am I right?"

"Perhaps so. I decline to answer more definitely. Do you play?"

"How rapidly you glide from subject to subject, Yes, miss, I try to play sometimes."

"Will you play for me now?"

"If you desire it, and will return the favor."

He sat down to the instrument and in a masterly manner ran his fingers over the keys, then glided into a march from Mendelssohn. He was a master performer and knew it, but he was not prepared for the transformation that greeted his eyes when he finished. Stella McMurray was standing by him, and her features, that before he had thought plain, beamed with surprise and admiration, her eyes beautiful in the expression of pleasure that shone from them as she raised them to his face. She had not spoken a word, when he said,

"Why, Miss McMurray, what a fascination music possesses for you! I had no idea you had such a passion for it."

"Who could help being fascinated by such music as that?" she answered.

"Thank you," he replied. "I regard that as the highest compliment, Miss McMurray, that my musical efforts ever received."

"Has no one ever told you so before?"

"Words intended to convey the same meaning as yours have been spoken to me many times, but the expression on your face flatters me more than your words."

"Are you fond of music?"

"Very?"

"Then how grateful you ought to be for the great gift you possess!"

"I am grateful for my capabilities, but a fellow is so apt to think he would appreciate other people's talents if he had them, and undervalue his own."

"It is not right, though. Every gift that we possess was given us for a purpose, and it is our duty to try to turn it to a good account."

"Miss McMurray will you sit here and play something for me?"

"How can you ask such a thing? But I will do the best I can, Mr. Elton," she said, as she accepted the proffered seat. "Mind, I have not the slightest idea of entertaining you, but I hope I will not amuse you."

He rose from the music stool and stood leaning against the organ in a lazily graceful manner, while she played one of her exercises.

"You did it well, Miss McMurray," he said, when she had finished. "That was not an easy lesson. Now, I have a proposition to make. Will you allow me to instruct you as much as I am able, during my stay here?"

"Allow you? Why, Mr. Elton, it would give me the greatest pleasure; but I could not think of so encroaching upon your time. You came here to enjoy yourself."

"Yes, and I expect to. And if you will agree to my proposition, I will consider it one of the most fruitful sources of enjoyment that I have."

"Indeed, you are very, very kind, Mr. Elton, to offer it, but I cannot accept your proposition just as it stands. May I offer an amendment?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will receive your instructions, gladly, if you will allow me to compensate you."

"Well, I will. Shall I state the terms now?"

"If you please," as though a burden was lifted from her mind.

"Then let us be friends—the best of friends. Let me regard you as a sister. I have none."

Her face darkened again. "That will be no equivalent whatever. We could be friends anyway."

"You had only my interest in view when you offered to repay me," he said, in his own peculiarly pleasant voice, "and now when I state the terms you are not satisfied. Come, let us consider the matter settled. Every afternoon at two o'clock, remember, is the hour."

Just at this juncture Mr. Todhunter sauntered into the room, immaculate in clean linen, and his hair smoothly parted in the middle.

"Oh! ah!" he exclaimed, assuming an attitude. "Beg pardon! Didn't know that you were alone."

Mr. Elton glanced mischievously at Stella, and answered, "No need of an apology, sir; neither of us was alone."

"The soft strains of your music drew me hither, Miss McMurray," Mr. Todhunter said, in a voice that affected to be very gentle. "Would I be trespassing on your kindness were I to plead for one more piece?"

"The female character is very susceptible to entreaty," said Mr. Elton, twisting his moustache to hide the lurking smile. "I am sure she will gratify you."

Stella was keenly alive to the ridiculousness of her position, but knowing that a moment's hesitation only made matters worse, she turned over her music, selected a pretty accompaniment, and played and sang.

"How exquisite! How beautiful!" Mr. Todhunter exclaimed, when she had finished. "What sweet thoughts such melody produces!"

Mr. Elton here made a movement as if to leave the

room, but Stella looked up at him as much as to say: "Oh, please don't!" He understood it, and, dropping into the nearest chair, said: "Yes, Mr. Todhunter, it does, without the slightest shadow of a doubt."

As soon as politeness would allow, she excused herself and left the room.

Stella McMurray and Harry Elton became at once the best of friends. There was nothing in his honest, open countenance to cause her to hesitate in giving him her friendship, and he admired her from the first, for her originality and frankness, her quiet dignity of manner and her sweetness of disposition. In this quiet, homelike place they were naturally thrown much together, for very want of a wider range of companionship. It was an every-day occurrence to see the two sauntering carelessly through the orchard, evidently intent upon nothing but a lively chat, but actually searching for apples; but when the mother wished to economize time, she endeavored to send them one at a time. So their friendship for each other strengthened as the long Summer days wore on; and they shelled peas together, and together pared the early harvest apples, read and sang together, and the music lessons went on with unvarying regularity.

CHAPTER III.

THE little church near Waverley Hall was crowded, although the afternoon was very warm. The minister was not tiresome. He preached a short, practical sermon, so that the congregation, instead of feeling weary, were instructed and edified, despite the intense heat and continual waving of fans. Mr. McMurray, a

strict church-goer himself, made provision not only for his own family to attend church, but also "the stranger that was within his gates." Stella McMurray looked very pretty that afternoon in her white swiss muslin, relieved by a knot of blue ribbon here and there, her pretty curls fastened back by a ribbon of the same hue, and surmounted by a jaunty white hat.

"Stella," said Harry Elton, as she sprang into the buggy with him after service, "you look as pretty as a picture and as cool and refreshing as if the thermometer didn't stand at ninety degrees in the shade."

"Thank you; I am sorry I cannot return the compliment."

"The deuce."

"Oh, Harry, don't use such words. They are altogether superfluous, and, pardon me, ungentlemanly, too."

"Well, if this isn't consistency, then I never met with it. You throw a fellow's natural defects in his face by bluntly telling him he's ugly, then if he happens to use an expletive that doesn't occur in the Bible while he's smarting under the sore, you exclaim, 'Oh, Harry, don't,' in the most provoking manner possible."

"You misunderstood me, sir," she replied, "my remark referred only to the latter part of yours. To be frank with you, you look as though there were no fans in the world."

"Ah! beg pardon," as Tod says: "as I specially meant for you to hear the first part of my speech, I overlooked the balance and supposed you did, too."

"The American predeliction for abbreviating is strong in you, Harry. Why do you not give the gentleman the benefit of his full name?"

"Because it's saying so much to get at a very small idea.

"How sarcastic you are. Am I to infer that you call me 'Stel' sometimes, for the same reason?"

"No."

"Then what am I to understand?"

"Simply this. The abbreviation that I use sometimes, instead of saying Mr. St. George Todhunter, fully covers the character and soul of the individual named, both of which are excessively diminutive, besides leaving me more time for the discussion of weightier subjects. Is my explanation satisfactory?"

"Not altogether."

By this time they were nearing the homestead, the rest of the party having gone in advance of them.

"Who is that gentleman standing on the porch with Brother George?" she inquired.

"I believe your brother introduced him as Mr. Preston."

"Oh, yes. I should hardly have known him again."

"You have known him, then?"

"Yes, some years ago. I was quite a child when he went away to college." Her brother came forward and introduced them, as she came upon the porch.

"You have changed so entirely, Mr. Preston," she said, after they had exchanged salutations, "that I did not recognize you at all."

"It is useless for me to say that time has worked in the same mysterious manner with you, Miss Stella," he replied.

After a few such commonplace remarks, she passed through into the house. After tea, Mr. Elton sat down to the organ and played, and Stella sang with him; her sweet, clear voice mingling well with his strong basso. With music and conversation, the

evening passed away very swiftly. Before he took his leave, he had promised to come again and be sociable as in the olden time. The next day, when writing to Philip Martin, in accordance with the promise given in the opening of our story, the following sentences slipped from his pen:

"I was astonished to notice yesterday, in church, the many pretty faces of young ladies who were children when I went away. And I tell you, Phil, some of them have developed into something very attractive. I saw last night a pair of bright eyes that will play havoc with somebody's heart, some day."

About a month had passed since our friends arrived from the city, when, one morning at breakfast, Mrs. Morrison astonished them all by expressing her intention of returning to the city. Mrs. McMurray, surprised at this sudden determination, inquired if she was not comfortably situated. "As comfortable," she replied, "as it is in your power, I suppose, to make me, but I am nervous, and can never accustom myself to country people and their ways." Harry Elton's blue eyes flashed wlth indignation at this unpardonable rudeness, but Mrs. McMurray replied independently: "You are perfectly right in cultivating politeness, and going among refined people. We didn't promise any accomplishments. Father'll take you to the station whenever you're ready to go." Poor Miss Ross! Every one at the table pitied her. She looked so keenly sensitive to her aunt's unkind remark. They were sorry to say "good-by" to her, but no one grieved when Mrs. Morrison turned her face toward the city again from whence she came. And this characteristic remark slipped Mrs. McMurray's tongue as the carriage rolled away bearing the retreating party: "I've humored that woman's whims more'n

I ever did anybody else's, but she's been humored till humorin' is no use to her."

CHAPTER IV.

"COME now, you young folks," she said, almost in the same breath, "here is a basket of apples, pare and core them nicely, and don't be all the morning at it."

Now, when Mrs. McMurray gave a commission of this kind to the "young folks," it seldom included more than Stella and young Elton, but this time Mr. Todhunter happened to be present, and of course considered himself bound to respond to the call. Mrs. McMurray brought the basket of rosy apples out on the porch and set it down before them. Harry Elton promptly produced his pocket-knife and went to the task assigned to him, and as promptly ate the first one he pared. Stella brought from the kitchen a large wooden bowl to receive the fruit, and sat down complacently to work also. But Mr. Todhunter, who had been standing in an undecided, awkward way, said:

"Miss Stella, will you furnish me with a knife and allow me to assist you?"

"It is not necessary, Mr. Todhunter, that you should do this," she replied. "Harry and I will soon finish."

"Would you send me away, and deprive me of the pleasure of your company?" he asked, directing one of his most thrilling glances at her.

When she looked up and met Harry Elton's mischievous eyes, she decided the sooner the matter was settled the better. So she quickly produced the knife, and said,

"Of course, sir, if you really wish it, you can help us."

Then arose another difficulty. Mr. Todhunter looked first at his spotless white duck suit, then at the rude, painted bench on which they were sitting, and Harry Elton, anticipating the look, brought out a large white linen handkerchief, and spreading it over the bench near where Stella sat, said,

"There, Mr. Tod, I think there's no danger."

"Thanks," said the individual addressed, as he sat down upon it, not comprehending in the least the covert jest.

"I have oftentimes," he continued, addressing Stella, "derived great pleasure from pursuing some humble employment with a congenial companion."

"I think I would be very unhappy if compelled to live among people who were not so," she replied.

"Oh, yes, I doubt it not. I trust you will never be so unfortunate. I'm sure you will not," with another excrutiating glance.

"You're in for it now, Stel," Harry whispered under his breath, then said aloud,

"I'm sure you can avert that danger, Mr. Tod."

"Thanks, sir. I wish I were not such a prey to timidity. I am afraid I do not always appear in the light that I would wish. My disposition is naturally very retiring."

"As for me, Mr. Todhunter," Stella said, anxious to say something that would turn the tide of conversation, "I look upon modesty as a crowning virtue in anyone."

"Do you? Ah, it makes me happy to hear you say it."

Poor Stella inwardly wished that he would gratify

his disposition by retiring, but determined to make one more venture.

"It is more praiseworthy to cultivate virtue when we are not applauded for it than when we are. It is easy to do a popular thing."

"I know of one whose approbation I would prize more than the applause of a multitude," laying considerable stress on the "one."

Stella turned quickly to Mr. Elton, whose presence Mr. Todhunter had almost ignored, and said, "Harry, will you name those apple seeds for me?" as she placed four apple-seeds on the palm of her hand.

"Oh, yes, certainly." He looked at them a moment; then said, "Well, proceed."

She took one up and commenced the old rhyme: "This one I'll take, and never forsake."

"That is the young chap that looked so wicked at me last Sunday. What did you say his name is? Dean!"

"I suppose so. This is my heart's desire."

"Mr. Preston."

"This one I prize beyond the skies."

"Oh, that's Tod. I thought it would be so."

Stella looked at her friend reprovingly when he said this. She thought she had ruled Mr. Todhunter out of the question when she commenced this little game, but Harry's mischief had introduced him just where she did not want him.

"And this I'll throw in the fire!"

"Your humble servant. Just my luck."

"It was all wrong."

"Why, Miss Stella, I thought it worked off beautifully," said Mr. Todhunter. "Fortunes are hidden in games of chance sometimes."

"This was not a game of chance," she replied.

"Harry has the happy faculty of being able to put any face on affairs he may choose."

"I'd rather act in the capacity of scapegoat to you than be banished entirely," said the gentleman alluded to, in a very meek tone of voice.

Mrs. Elton appeared on the scene just at this moment, and tapping her son on the cheek with her fan, said: "Isn't he a sad fellow? Don't you get tired of his teasing, Stella?" all the time regarding him with a look that spoke volumes in his favor.

"Oh, no ma'am," she replied, "I do not mind it at all, while he makes himself so useful."

"Beautiful example of disinterested regard," said Harry. "But see here, mother mine," as he drew the fat, good-natured-looking lady down upon his knee, "how would you like a drive this beautiful morning?"

"Very much, sir, if it will inconvenience no one."

"George kindly offered me the use of his horse and buggy. So run and get ready and look your prettiest."

"To be sure I will do that," and off she went.

Stella now disappeared within the kitchen with her bowl of apples all ready for use, and Harry went to the barn to harness up the horse.

"Thank you, Mr. Todhunter, for your assistance," said Stella, turning toward him. "Will you walk in the parlor now, if you please, and find more entertaining employment?"

"May I have your company there also?" he asked, accompanying his words with a smile intended to be very winning.

"Thank you, but I must assist mother this morning. There is a great deal to do."

"Well, I suppose I must submit," and the disap-

pointed swain took himself off to the parlor, and Stella, baring her plump white arms to the elbow, was soon deep in the mysteries of breadmaking, while her thoughts were busy with Mr. Todhunter. She very much disliked his insinuating conversation, yet pitied more than she disliked him. She knew him to be a man of very shallow intellect, and blushed for him when he unconsciously made himself the butt of ridicule. Yet she could not make him sensible of this fact, without wounding his feelings, and this she instinctively shrank from doing.

While she was thus employed Harry Elton came in, and in his merry, bantering way said: "I declare, Stella, I never saw you appear to better advantage in my life. I'm sure that if Tod would only see you now, these serious impressions that have been forming within his inmost soul since he came here, would be sensibly deepened. Guess I'll call him."

Laughing, he moved toward the door, while Stella begged, "Oh, please don't, Harry! I shall certainly be angry with you if you do." But when she encountered his gay, mischievous expression, she laughed too, in very spite of herself.

Mrs. Elton here came in, all equipped for the ride, and noticing Stella's blank expression, said, "Harry, you have been teasing again," And Stella said, "I intend to take him seriously to task about something when he comes back."

"What have I done now?" He endeavored to look very serious, but it was a sad failure.

"Just like him," said his mother, "he is always getting into scrapes."

CHAPTER V.

NINA HUDSON was an orphan. Her father was Mrs. Preston's brother, and her mother a native of Harrisburgh. Her father, a pedagogue by profession, taught a private school in H——, for some years, and here became acquainted with Miss Fanny Lovejoy, who afterwards became his wife. Like many other steady, quiet, honest, intelligent men, Mr. Hudson never accumulated anything. If he made but little, it was sufficient for their expenses; and if he realized more, there was no overplus at the end of the year. Thus they lived on, within their income, but never saving anything therefrom. And the consequence was, that when Nina, at the tender age of three years, was bereft of both her parents, there had been no provision made for her support. But, fortunately for her, a maiden sister of her mother's, Miss Adeline Lovejoy, adopted the little orphan, and cared for her with the tenderest solicitude. She, too, had been thrown on her own resources for a livelihood, but unlike her brother-in-law, she always managed to set aside a right good sum every year for that "rainy day" that everyone experiences some time in life. So all of the little orphan's needs were met and supplied by the kind-hearted aunt, who loved her only sister's only child devotedly. But Miss Lovejoy was not a woman to pamper and humor the whims of a child, and thereby belittle its understanding. She was an intelligent, Christian woman; and, in the first place, she endeavored, and with signal success, too, to inculcate into the youthful mind of her charge, religious principles; then she gave her healthful ideas of industry, independence and self-support. Now, there was one event in the history of this aunt of Nina's

which it may be as well to mention right here. "She had had a lover once," as the song goes, who played her false. She was young, ardent, affectionate, and loved him dearly. He was handsome, wealthy, intellectual and villainous; and when he grew tired of his pastime, and trod on the heart that loved him so fondly, the effect on her was to sour and embitter her heart toward all mankind for all time. She was busy in good works, though—always busy. She was the tried and true friend of the friendless, the poor, or the sick; but she shook her head sagely at the idea of truth and constancy in man, and retired within herself for the happiness she had missed elsewhere. She might have married after this. Very likely there were others who would have appreciated her; but she resolutely kept all men aloof, and persistently avoided their company as much as possible. The tenderest, most sacred feelings of her nature had been toyed with, then thrown aside; and whether or not another hand could have awakened the sweet, still chords to music, certain it is she never allowed any one to make the experiment. Consequently, Nina was seldom thrown into the company of anyone but her aunt, her schoolmates and a few dear female friends until she reached her thirteenth year, when her aunt thought fit to send her into another State, to a seminary of good standing, where young ladies were carefully and thoroughly educated. At this age, her principles were well formed, and she was, certainly, a very creditable representative of her aunt's skill in training. She was a loving, affectionate child, conscientious and self-sacrificing, modest and unassuming, yet self-possessed in manner, sound in principle, and, if thrown in the company of gentlemen, very retiring and unobtrusive, evidently regarding them as something use-

ful sometimes, if kept at a proper distance, but extremely dangerous upon a nearer approach. So much for early training. And when a child has reached this age the balance of its lifetime is not sufficient to alter its principles, be they good or bad.

So Nina Hudson made plenty of stanch friends, through her kindness and amiability, during the six years of her school-life, and when, at the age of eighteen she returned to her aunt and her native place, she came a pious, thoroughly educated and very accomplished woman; fine-looking though not pretty; possessing one of those attractive faces, which, when you look at it once, you cannot define the motive, yet you wish to look again. And Miss Adeline Lovejoy realized her brightest anticipations in the little orphan, who, through sorrow, had fallen to her charge; and she gathered her to her lonely heart with as much affection as if she had been her very own. It was during the summer subsequent to her return from school that she came to visit her aunt, Mrs. Preston. Stella McMurray had not seen her since they were children, and was very anxious to renew their acquaintance. So she and Mr. Elton walked over to Mr. Preston's. Stella had invited Mr. Todhunter to go, but he was so unfortunate as to have a swollen lip, and was scarcely presentable. This is how it happened: He was leisurely strolling over the fields, that morning, when he, unexpectedly, of course, came upon one of those hidden snares which bright, green fields often hold—a bee's nest in a tuft of grass. And before he could make his exit and apologize (and he did the former as speedily as possible, you may believe), one of the ill-used family had stung him on the lip. Poor fellow! he was just beginning to like the country a little, and now it was just as full of hardships and difficulties as ever. And

when he came into the house and related his troubles, Harry Elton, instead of sympathizing with him, as he might have done, laughed heartily and said,

"Never mind, Tod, I wouldn't worry over it. The experience will be worth a great deal to you, and the experimental knowledge you now have of the way those insects live. Hereafter take your cane and prospect a little before you step. It is the only safe way to do in the country."

And Mr. Todhunter evidently thought it was, for he looked very woe-begone as he took the soda and water from Mrs. McMurray's hand and walked upstairs. And that was the reason he missed the tea-party. About a score of young people were assembled in the pleasant parlor at Mrs. Preston's, and all seemed to be enjoying themselves. They were grouped about the room in twos and fours, each group intent on their own subject of conversation. It fell to Mr. Elton's lot to entertain Miss Hudson, and truly it seemed to be a pleasant duty, and in justice to him, we must add, she was very agreeably entertained. There were no embarrassing pauses in the conversation, for Mr. Elton talked as he did everything else, naturally. In the meantime what has become of Stella? Morgan Preston and she are standing near the window looking out upon the lawn as it lay bathed in the moonlight.

"Let us walk out on the porch," he said, "and I will show you my beautiful constellation. I call it *mine* because it looks in at my window so kindly when I'm sitting there humoring my moods." He led her to the end of the porch, and pointed through an opening in the trees to the Pleiades.

"Could there be anything more beautiful?" was her animated exclamation. "How they sparkle and flash as they peep down at us through the trees. And

the myriads of stars, how I'd love to know them all by name. How beautiful it all is, both earth and sky."

"Now look in this direction. See those clusters of trees dotting the landscape here and there, and those white farmhouses, with their windows glistening and glinting in the moonlight."

"Oh, if I were an artist I'd paint a wonderful picture, and immortalize myself, surely." Then, in a more serious tone, "can you not imagine Dr. Young gazing on just such a scene as this when he wrote:

> 'How is night's sable mantle labored o'er,
> How richly wrought with attributes divine.'"

"Yes, and another thought comes with it. Many of us look and admire and appreciate as much probably as he, yet no one ever produced a second 'Night Thoughts.' We, individually, are like those stars in one respect, Miss Stella. We each have our separate sphere, and a certain something to do, but we must not try to operate outside of our natural orbit."

"That sounds very plausible; but I have seen those who I thought had mistaken their calling decidedly."

"Our calling; that is, whatever we are best fitted to perform."

"I do not agree with you. It is to 'do the duty that lies nearest thee,' as some writer has said, whether we are entirely fitted for it or not."

"And go through life making all manner of mistakes," he laughingly replied.

"No, that doesn't always follow. We can learn if we try, and the Master who assigns us our places will fit us to do his bidding. And on the other hand, we are competent sometimes to do greater things than our duty requires of us."

"Would you give up the greater, then, to perform the lesser work?"

"Undoubtedly we should, if duty points to the lesser."

"Well, we will not follow up this discussion," he said, "but come, sit here while I tell you some of my plans for the future."

They sat down on a rustic sofa at the end of the porch, and he surprised her by the announcement that he was about completing a course of study in physic. "I knew I would astonish you," he said, with boyish eagerness, "but this is my darling profession, and I am sure there is no mistake. At odd hours I have been reading and studying treatises on the subject for years. I am fully awake to the importance of the step. It is one that I would not take without long and mature deliberation."

"I sincerely wish that you may succeed," she replied, "but you have chosen a science that can only be mastered by severe study and close application."

"And you may add, during a life of practice."

"Yes, on that alone depends success; and that is what I wish for you most heartily."

"Thank you. I do not know when Professor S. will pronounce me ready for my contact with the world. I shall leave the question entirely with him."

After a little further conversation upon the subject so near his heart, Mr. Preston consulted his watch and found that it had been an hour since they left the parlor.

"An hour!" She echoed his words in surprise.

"Yes. Will you allow me to take you in now, and promise to try to reinstate me in Mr. Elton's good graces?"

"Reinstate you! Have you fallen?"

"I am afraid so."

"How?"

"By keeping you away so long."

"If that is your only offense, I guess he'll forgive you."

On entering the room she went directly to where Mr. Elton sat, and said pleasantly:

"Harry, I dislike monopolies. You have had undisputed possession of Nina's company since tea. Is that fair?"

"I have only been trying feebly to compensate for your absence," he replied.

"And Stella, I am sure you do not look as though the time had dragged heavily with you," Miss Hudson remarked dryly.

"Nor has it," was the quick rejoinder. "But now I demand a change. Jennie Loyd, come here, please."

A pretty little dark-haired girl arose and came forward obediently and said: "Here am I."

"I want you to entertain Mr. Elton while I talk to Nina."

"Well," she said, looking at him demurely, "what am I expected to do?"

As he rose to hand her a chair, he replied laughingly, "I believe there is no prescribed line of action, Miss Loyd. I hope you will not find your task a severe one."

This provoked a general laugh, and in a little while, thanks to the good management of a few, conversation became more general, and lively pleasantries were exchanged quite freely. When the hour came for separating, and young Elton and Stella were on their way home, she asked him quite naturally: "How did you enjoy the company?"

"Very much indeed," was the reply. "Ever so

much more than those where we are expected to play the exquisite, talk nonsense, dance all night and bore ourselves generally."

"You do not attend such parties, do you, Harry?"

"To be sure I do. Why not?"

"You have answered your own question. Because it is wrong."

"Wrong? In what respect, pray?"

"In many respects. You know as well as I, and it is not worth my while to try to enumerate them. Your own admission a moment ago was very condemnatory. Does 'talking nonsense and dancing all night' tend to improve one's moral, mental or physical condition?"

"Oh, never mind, Stella, it's pastime anyway. Besides, what does a dear, little, unsophisticated girl like you know about it?"

"Enough to convince me that what I say is true. We were not placed here merely to find pastime. We are responsible beings with an immortal destiny to be shapen out and determined in a few, brief transitory years, and we cannot afford to fritter away our time with those employments that necessarily lead us farther away from God, and unfit our minds for serious and profitable reflections."

She paused, but he made no reply. After a moment she asked: "Harry, would you advise me, if I could, to follow up the life that those ladies lead who are habitual ball-goers?"

"No," he said, with emphasis, "you are a thousand times more sensible, better, purer and happier than they."

"Then *you* ought not to countenance such places, or visit them. You are conscious, all the time, that

your conduct is sinful. Why do you do it when you know you are doing wrong?"

"How am I to help it? It's a common thing in our set."

"Never mind your 'set.' Do what you think is right, individually."

"Confound it all, I wish I could," he said, impatiently.

"Oh, don't say it that way," in a subdued voice.

"Then why don't you talk of something else, instead of holding a fellow at bay, this way?"

"Because I want to see your life dedicated to a nobler purpose. By giving God your heart you may make it a career of usefulness, by withholding it, you prostitute all His glorious gifts to a miserable purpose and make of life a desperate failure. Which will you choose?"

He did not answer for a moment, then he said very seriously: "Stella, it is no easy matter to break off from doing a thing that one has been practicing for twenty-eight years. If my parents—dear, kind, indulgent souls—had forbidden it in the outset, and been a little more strict—but pshaw! I don't know that it makes any difference after all."

"Harry, answer me candidly, do you really enjoy that kind of life?"

"Enjoy it! No. I have been sick and tired of it for years."

"Then it will require no sacrifice on your part to give it up. Strange that you have not done so. Why persist in doing that which not only brings you no pleasure, but also brings the disapproval of your conscience?"

"Because other people expect me to."

"That's a flimsy reason."

"It's the best I have on hand." Spoken with assumed jocularity.

"'Other people' will not take the burden off you when you come to render your account for years of wasted life," very seriously.

"I wish they could. It would save me a great deal of thinking."

"Well, Harry, it's your own fault. Why not be a man, instead of a tool in the hands of other people? It is your imperative duty to give up those practices that you know are evil, and that your better nature is fighting against."

"That would be easy enough, Stella, if I were in a position to do it. You live in a quiet place, where people are generally sensible, moral and humane; I, in a crowded city, where temptations meet one at every crossing, and where every man is for himself, and if they jostle one out of existence, or into perdition, it's nothing as long as it's customary, or comes in the way of business."

"Oh, Harry! if you only enjoyed religion, these obstacles that seem so formidable to you now, would be as nothing."

"If I did! But I do not, Stella." There was more earnestness in his voice when he said this than Stella had expected, but she had the tact to appear not to notice it, as they had now reached home, and she thought it best not to pursue the subject any further at this time. So she simply said,

"I am glad you have enjoyed the evening, Harry. Here is your light, and I will bid you good-night."

"Good night, Stella, little sister."

Ascending to her room, she sat down by her window and watched the moonlight flickering in and out among the trees. And as she sat there meditating,

she realized what she had never done before—that she was a woman, and no longer a child—a woman with a woman's influence. She had never thought of it before, never dreamed that *she* might influence anyone for good or evil. She had always considered herself a child, to be guided by others, but never presuming to guide another. She understood young Elton's nature well, and to-night she was convinced that his gaiety and trifling was only surface work; that underlying all his frivolity was a noble soul and a mind that understood and entertained serious forebodings of the life to come. Young as she was, she saw in him the material for a grand and useful manhood, but his mind wanted instruction, guidance and gentle dealing. She fell on her knees in the bright summer moonlight, and while the cool breezes fanned her flushed face and played with her glossy hair she lifted up to heaven as earnest an appeal as ever went up from a newly-awakened and contrite heart. The tears oozed through her slender fingers, as with her hands pressed to her face she prayed: "Oh, Father, I am all unworthy to be called Thy child, but from the depths of my conscience-stricken heart I pray Thee help me to be more watchful and prayerful, more consistent and patient, in every way more Christ-like! Help me to save him, my friend. Give me this thing to do. Help me so to live that my hitherto useless life may hereafter exert over him an influence for good, and Thy great name shall evermore be praised!" She rose from her knees, pushed the wavy, clinging hair from her forehead, and stood leaning against the casement in deep and silent meditation.

Mr. Elton had not yet retired, for the perfume of his cigar still came floating in at her window. When the

clock chimed out the hour of midnight, with her heart full of noble resolves, she retired to her rest. And young Elton, enjoying his fragrant Havana, had to acknowledge to himself that Stella's words of reproof, given in crude and simple language, had made a deeper impression on his mind than he would be willing for her to know. And these words would come up in spite of him: "Why not be a man, instead of a tool in the hands of others, and do what you know is right?" With an impatient movement he tossed the stump of his cigar out of the window and muttered under his breath: "Why not, sure enough! I'm free to confess that what she says is true, but for a fellow of my standing, who never did a commendable thing in his life, it's an ugly subject for contemplation." And when he had finished this brief soliloquy, he, too, retired to rest.

CHAPTER VI.

YEARS ago, there lived in the McMurray household, a tried and trusty servant, who, having charge of the children, was justly regarded as holding a responsible position. When the children grew away from her care, and she became too enfeebled for other work, Mr. McMurray generously donated to "Aunt Polly," as she was called, a small house for her own use. Here she lived alone with her daughter, and felt as independent as "the folks in the big house." The daughter's earnings, supplemented by Mr. McMurray's kindness, kept them from want.

On the evening of the day following the events recorded in the last chapter, Stella suddenly remembered the fact that she had not seen Aunt Polly for several

weeks. So she hurriedly gathered a few delicacies into a basket, and with it on her arm, started down the footpath which led to the rude dwelling. As she approached it, she saw in the open doorway the old woman, rocking to and fro, and crooning to herself an old African melody:

"Nobody knows de trouble, I see,
Nobody but Jesus;
No one knows but God an' me,
Nobody but Jesus."

"Good evening, Auntie," Stella said, as she came in quietly, and dropped into the nearest chair. "Singing about your troubles, are you?"

"Laws a-massy, chile, ye start me. No, honey, I wasn't thinkin' so much 'bout de trouble, as dat God knows it."

"Yes, He knows it to be sure, auntie, and yet permits you to suffer it. How about that?"

"Why, bress you, chile, bring it down to fine p'ints, an' I ain't got no trouble. Why, what could de Lawd do fur me dat He hain't done? Jes' look at dis yere house an' dat tater patch, all mine. 'Nuff to eat an' to wear' an' I jes' a settin' yere rockin' myself, an' t'inkin' about dat house He's got fur me up yander. I'se really 'sprised at myself fur singin' sech a sacreligious fing."

Stella's musical voice rang out in laughter at Auntie's earnest philosophy, and she said, "Truly, I haven't seen such a picture of contentment since I saw you last. Why don't you scold me for neglecting you so long? I deserve it richly."

"Honey, I ain't got no time for scoldin'. Life's too short fur dat, an' I'se too glad to see ye. Laws a massy, I ain't got no right to complain. Ef you

wusn't a mighty good chile you'd neber 'member, nohow."

Stella answered again laughingly, "Thank you, Auntie; but, indeed, I think I would be a very bad child if I failed to remember you kindly. Now, here is something I brought for your supper," uncovering her basket and disclosing its contents.

"Lawd bress you honey. Now, wouldn't I be an ongrateful critter ef I didn't t'ank de good Master fur puttin' it into your heart to be so good to me? I ain't got no right to 'spect it. It's jes' pure, onmarited blessin's. All day I'se been longin' fur somefin' from de ole house, but I didn't know de Lawd was takin' any 'count ob it."

"Now, Auntie, do you really think that because God knew that you wanted these things He impressed me to bring them?"

"Sartinly, honey. I believes jes' 'zactly dat. He condescends to notice a poor old black fing like me. An' while He keeps all dem stars out dere a swingin' round in dere places—an' I did hear somebody say once somefin' 'bout dis yarth movin' too, but laws, I don' believe no sich nonsense as dat—yet He considers my wants, an' dat's jes' why you brung dem nice things to me."

"I more than half believe you, Auntie. But since you have called my attention to the stars, I am reminded that I must not tarry much longer. Shall I read something to you before I go?"

"Please do, honey. It seems like de longest while sence I heard anybody read dat bressed Book."

In a tone of self-condemnation Stella replied, "Oh, Auntie, I'm so sorry that I have neglected you so. It certainly must not occur again."

"'Scuse me, honey. I wan't complainin'. Ye're the sweetest chile' in the wurld. Read on."

She turned to the eighth chapter of Romans, but before she had finished the second verse, Aunt Polly interrupted her with, "Dat's it, 'no condemnation.' Go on, now, honey."

She read it through, slowly and feelingly, and when she laid aside the book Auntie was weeping freely.

"Why do you cry, Auntie? Isn't it comforting?"

"Oh, yes, honey, It's comfortin'. But dere's so many blessin's promised dere to de faithful, dat I can't hardly believe dey's for me too, an' all I'se got to do is to trust Him. Why it says nuthin' shall separate us from de love o' Christ—distress nor poverty nor nuthin'. An' jes' see how He takes care ob me and s'plies all my needs. An' I never done nuthin' only cling to his bressed feet."

Solemnly Stella answered, "Auntie, I wish you would teach me your faith."

"I think ye's a learnin' it honey, from a better Teacher ner me. Are ye goin'?"

"Yes; it's getting late; but I'll come soon again."

"Do, Miss Stella."

And with a pleasant "Good-bye" she started down the narrow footpath leading toward home.

Directly in her path was a favorite resort of Stella's where she often came to read and reflect. A deep ravine, through which ran a noisy, laughing brooklet and stretching almost from bank to bank, a broad, mossy rock, where on its flinty side had been worn, by some strange process of nature, a rude though not uncomfortable seat. On one bank of the little streamlet rose a huge pile of rocks, its top and jagged sides covered with a thick growth of ferns and underbrush; on the other towered a hill overgrown with large

forest trees. Guarded by these two grim sentinels the busy brooklet went gurgling and splashing along over the imbedded rocks in which it had worn great hollows and ridges in its centuries of frolic and glee. But the girl, her mind too full of the practical, active duties of life, only stopped a few minutes this evening, threw a handful of pebbles into the stream, then hurried on to her home.

Harry Elton met her in the doorway, with the greeting, "Well, Miss Truant, pray where have you been? You have just returned in time to prevent a tragedy. Tod was becoming quite alarmed, and all my powers of persuasion have been brought into action to prevent him from doing violence to himself."

Stella laughed merrily, as she replied, "You are not exaggerating a bit, are you, Harry?"

"Is it customary, Miss Stella, for young ladies to wander out alone at this time of evening?" said Mr. Todhunter, at hearing his name pronounced.

"Yes, sir; quite customary," she replied; "and, besides, I have been but a short distance from home."

"Pardon me if I have been but too solicitous for your safety," he answered, smiling sweetly toward her.

"Certainly," was the reply, as with freezing dignity she glanced at Harry's mirthful visage. But Mrs. Elton kindly came to her rescue by saying,

"Here, Stella, I've opened the organ, and even drawn the stops. Come, you and Harry, and sing something inspiring and sweet, before we separate for the night."

Stella was really glad of the opportunity, but Harry whispered, as he walked with her toward the organ,

"Only a piece or two, Stel; then we'll find a nice quiet corner for a chat."

She gave him a quick, grateful glance, and answered, "Very well, Harry." And the thought that came instantly into her mind was this, "Oh! if I can only say something to lead him into a better life."

First they sang an earnest, soul-stirring hymn commencing,

"We thank thee, Oh, Father."

Then with the broken language of the old colored woman still fresh in her mind, she turned to an anthem, "Happy are they who keep his commandments," and sang it with the same earnestness and feeling. But as soon as the last notes died away, young Elton drew her hand within his arm, and the two walked out on the piazza, sat down on the rustic bench in the moonlight, where they soon became oblivious to the fact that the other occupants of the room were leaving it one by one, until only her brother George remained, and he was evidently inclined to fall asleep over the evening papers.

As soon as they were comfortably disposed—Stella and her companion—he, with his face turned toward her, his elbow resting on the baluster, his head on his hand, nonchalantly remarked,

"Another ordeal safely passed. I'm glad it's over."

Surprised, she asked, "What do you mean, Harry?"

"Oh, those hilarious pieces! There's one more you ought to have sung in connection with them."

"What's that?"

"Well, it starts out with some such jocular exclamation as this, 'Hark from the tombs, a doleful sound.' It would have been a charming companion piece for the others."

She answered reproachfully,

"Harry, I would not speak so lightly of sacred things, if I were you."

"Oh, well, I won't then, of course, if you don't approve of it. I wouldn't have you 'sot agin' me for all creation. But you'll allow me to remark in passing, that you have a rare faculty for inappropriate selections."

There was so much drollery in his bluntness that she laughed heartily before replying,

"Why, I think they are beautiful. One a hymn of thanksgiving that we ought to be always ready to render, and the other only a pretty way of repeating one of the sweetest promises in the Bible."

"I could sing them with great gusto in church, but they might have been dispensed with for this evening."

"What would have been your selection, Harry?"

"Now, I'll tell you. Tod sat back there with a face as long as a ramrod, and I especially desired to sing, for his benefit solely, 'Love's Chidings.' It has just as much sense in it as he has. You know the chorus comes in just as often as you choose to sing it,

'Hast thou no feeling,
To see me kneeling,
My love revealing
Day after day?'

It would have been a sort of safety-valve, you know, and he's beginning to need something of that sort. He'll not keep his feelings pent up much longer. There's going to be an explosion."

Stella did not laugh at his raillery, because she so much disliked Mr. Todhunter's advances, and Harry Elton knew it. So she answered quite seriously,

"Harry, you know I wouldn't sing it, and I'm disappointed in the conversation that you asked for."

"Why, Stel, what's wrong with it?"

"Everything. I had hoped that you would talk seriously to me this evening. But you never do. Harry, tell me the reason. Do I seem inconsistent, too trifling, too ignorant, or what? The fault must be mine."

He turned himself around on the bench, put both hands in his pockets, and gave a low, impatient whistle, as he said,

"No, it isn't, Stel. You are as consistent as any old grandmother. A perfect jewel of consistency. But a man can't be all the time talking seriously. Too much strain on his nervous system."

"Please tell me, Harry, when you held a serious conversation with me," said Stella.

"I never could remember dates."

"Well, right now, Harry, if I ask you a personal question, will you frankly answer me?"

He wheeled around again to his old position, and with an incorrigible expression on his face said, "I will, certainly. Now, fire a whole broadside at me."

"In all your merry life did it ever occur to you that you are treating your best Friend, He in whose hand your breath is, with cruel ingratitude?"

"Certainly." And with a more thoughtful expression of face he asked, "You think I'm awfully wicked, don't you, Stella?"

"I do not. But you would be infinitely better than you are, and happier, if you were a Christian."

"No one knows that better than I."

"Then, Harry, why not go to the Strong for strength. Give up your frivolous, empty life, and resolve to be a better man, God helping you."

He threw off all solemnity again and answered, "Oh, well, I will some time. When I'm seventy-five I'll be a consistent old church member, just like you."

"Suppose you don't live to that age?"

"Plenty do. In any case I couldn't make a change now."

"Trifling again. What made you speak that way when we were talking so seriously?"

"Why, its perfectly reasonable, Stella. What sane man would begin a reformation equal to Luther's at this hour of the night? It's a mighty big undertaking to revolutionize a fellow like me. Take a practical view of it now, and see if you don't think I had better take daylight for the enterprise."

She saw it was not worth while to try to bring him back to the subject, so she did the best thing she could do, talked on, just to please him. And while they sat there a shadow fell across the floor, and Morgan Preston ran up the steps and sat down upon the upper one.

"Good evening, friends," he said, his handsome face beaming with rosy health and good nature.

Stella quickly returned his salutation and offered him a chair, which he promptly refused, while Mr. Elton's startled exclamation was:

"Heigho, Mr. Preston. Is it common for you to take these nocturnal rambles?"

"It is by no means *un*common."

"Your appearance was startingly sudden."

"Was it?" laughing. "I had business beyond here a little distance, and I preferred to walk in the cool of the evening rather than in the heat of the day. Returning I saw your friendly light and determined to use the place as a kind of 'Palace Beautiful.'"

"Very good," young Elton replied. "Now we will try to make your call both pleasant and profitable. That is the way the damsels did in the 'Progress,' isn't it?"

"Yes, I've no doubt I'll be greatly improved ere I pass on."

They sat and talked pleasant nothings for a half hour or so. After inviting Elton to go fishing with him the next day, Mr. Preston bade them a polite "good evening."

Immediately afterward Elton took himself off to his room, and Stella, too, retired to rest. And Elton, mischievous fellow that he was, at the very moment when Stella was thinking that there was great hope for his reform, in spite of his persistent trifling, was weaving a plan in his brain which could he work it off to his satisfaction, would tease her unmercifully. Truth to tell, his principal object was to draw her attention from himself, for he felt her influence strongly, and determined not to yield without a struggle. And Mr. Preston as he walked home soliloquized thus with himself:

"There'll be a wedding at neighbor McMurray's one of these days. That's evident to the most casual observer. Well, it's all right. She's a sensible, pretty and accomplished girl, and he's a very good fellow, no doubt. Has plenty of money, rumor says, and that's more than she says about you, Morgie, my boy. At any rate it's going to be, and I couldn't help it if I'd try."

But in spite of the young man's philosophy, there was a lurking wish in his heart, not even acknowledged to himself, that Harry Elton had gone rusticating in the balmy atmosphere of California, instead of intruding his fascinating corporeity on the family of his unsuspecting neighbor.

CHAPTER VII.

THE morning dawned bright and beautiful, and gave promise of a sultry day, as July mornings often do. Two young men were reclining lazily under the shadow of a large apple tree in the orchard belonging to the McMurray homestead. They were the Messrs. Elton and Todhunter. Elton was throwing little sticks at the birds that twittered and whistled overhead, while Todhunter seemed perfectly content to be quiet and snuff in the delightful morning breeze without any unnecessary exertion. What a perfect picture of sweet content and indolence they made, as they lay there on that gentle green slope, so entirely oblivious to the hurry and worry work going on in the busy world around them.

So thought Stella McMurray, as she busied herself with the morning work, and saw them resting there. And Harry Elton, as his eyes fell on the slight figure moving in and out through the open doorway, remarked carelessly to his companion, as he threw another twig at a musical mocking-bird:

"You're a lucky dog, Todhunter."

"How so?"

"Any man who has won the affection of such a young lady as Miss McMurray has certainly been born under a lucky planet."

"Who said I had?" was the curt reply.

"Pshaw, now Tod, I'm not blind. You needn't beat about the bush with me. I can put two and two together as well as you can."

"Well, I do admire her, I'll not deny, but——"

"But what?"

"Oh, well, lots of things," spoken with a knowing look, while he stroked his beard complacently.

"Now, Tod, she's promised to marry you, hasn't she?"

"No, 'pon honor."

"Have you asked her?"

"No, not yet."

"Bless me, man, no wonder she hasn't promised you, then."

"Fact is, I hadn't quite made up my mind."

"Well, Tod, that isn't a big undertaking, is it? You'll have so little area to go over."

Seeing that his companion did not in the slightest degree comprehend the hidden sarcasm in his words, Harry Elton threw his head back and laughed uproariously. Then he went on without mercy.

"I'm an older man than you are, Tod, capable and willing to give you advice. If you'll listen I'll tell you something that you ought to thank me for as long as you live."

"Well, sir, what is it?"

"Perhaps it never occurred to you, but likely it has to your friends, that it is time you were starting an establishment of your own. Remember the demands that society makes upon such as you and all that. Ahem. Miss McMurray is just the woman to grace such an establishment like a queen. Your intellect alone would draw a brilliant following. Take my advice, and just as soon as she says the word, marry her."

"Suppose she doesn't care for me."

"Pshaw, now, Tod, you don't for a moment suppose that she can resist your charms. And it would be a crying shame for her to be disappointed in love so young. I'd lose my respect for you."

And when he thought how little there was of it to lose, he gave vent to another merry peal of laughter.

"Would you believe it, Elton, I thought you were making calculations for yourself in that direction."

"I? No, indeed! She doesn't care a rush for me. Good as told me so several times."

"Is that so? Well, I didn't understand her at all."

"I thought so. You ought to be very grateful to me for putting this matter before you in its proper light."

"Do you think the governor will approve?"

"Now, you don't think he'd be so foolish as to reject such an alliance? Why, he might look for a lifetime and not find just such a man as you, Tod, for a son-in-law. You just go right ahead now and ask her, and have it over with."

"Suppose she gives me no chance. I imagine sometimes she shuns me."

"Don't you see through that? Womanly modesty, man."

"Do you think that's it?"

"Certainly. Did you ever see a sensible woman throw herself in the way of the man she admires?"

"I never thought of that before, but I believe you are right. I thought she avoided me because she liked you better."

"Nonsense. Young ladies are a singular institution. If they like a fellow real well, they give him a severe letting alone."

"She's a fine girl, no doubt about that. Do you think I could do any better, take her for everything?"

"Better? Well, I shouldn't think so," laughing again, "If you trifle with Miss McMurray, Tod, I won't pity you if you never marry. Success will never attend you again; now, take my word for it."

"You encourage me very much. But isn't it a wonder that she didn't take a fancy to you, Elton?"

"Yes. But wonders will never cease. However, 'it's an ill wind that blows nowhar', and if you can build up a fortune on the wreck of mine, go ahead."

"And you really think there's no doubt of the result."

"Not the least in the world. Just have a little self-confidence. She's young and coy and hopeful, and may not seem to encourage your advances at first, but you must be persistent. I know exactly how it will end. I'm going away to-day. Will be gone all day and you'll have a clear coast."

"Are you?"

"Yes. Now, the field is yours. Improve your time. But let me tell you again (you see I understand her better than you do), if she seems inclined to change the subject, or to discourage you at first, don't mind it. You mustn't expect her to say 'yes' right at once. That isn't the way they do. But here comes Preston now, and I must go. I wish you the best of success."

"Thanks."

Young Preston here came upon the scene, fishing-tackle in hand, and the two walked to the house together. Mr. Elton ran upstairs to his room to exchange his light cloth coat for a linen one, and the two gentlemen sat on the shady porch. Stella was busy just inside. Young Preston saw her, smiled and bowed with his characteristic grace, then turned to his companion and conversation again, thinking how charmingly pretty she looked in her cool, morning dress, her face so radiant and rosy, and her form so lithe and graceful. In a few moments young Elton came to her side, and whispered,

"Stel, I wish you more solid enjoyment to-day than you ever experienced in the same length of time before in your life. If that broad-shouldered fellow wasn't standing there, do you know what I'd like? I know you are disappointed, too, but you'll have to excuse me this time. Good-by."

Stella sent a light, rippling laugh after him, and answered,

"I think your bump of impudence is very largely developed."

So the two young fishermen took themselves off to the woods, and Mr. Todhunter to his room.

Poor Stella. If she only could have known what was in store for her that day! She was very busy that morning. There was a great deal to do. The maid of all work was churning at the dairy, so the balance of the morning's work devolved on Stella and her mother. She rubbed the windows until they shone like crystal, then stood a few minutes looking at the inviting coolness without. She almost envied Wolf, the huge black Newfoundland, as he lay there in the shade, indolently snapping at the flies as they hummed past him. She thought of the pastry and light loaves that were yet to be prepared for dinner in the sickening heat of that kitchen.

"Come, Stella, don't stand there lookin' at things you've seen all your life, an' this bread a'most ready to run over."

Stella started at sound of her mother's voice, and said,

"Yes, mother, I was just thinking about the bread."

And in a few moments she was moulding out the loaves with the skill and rapidity of one who is accustomed to it.

"Morgan Preston has grown to be a fine lookin' young man, hasn't he?" her mother spoke again.

"Yes, ma'am, I think so."

"Where did he and Harry go this morning?"

"Fishing, down the little creek."

"Why didn't they take Todhunter?"

"I think I heard Mr. Preston invite him to go, as they stood on the porch, but he refused."

"Just like him. He never seems to enjoy what other human beings do." Stella made no reply; and in a moment her mother took up the conversation again. "I don't know when I saw a young man like Harry Elton. He's perfectly at home with everybody and makes no trouble, and there's something so kind and pleasant like, in them pretty blue eyes of his'n."

"Yes, ma'am, he is very nice," and the words were spoken with an unconscious sigh. Then in the interval of quiet that followed, she bewailed the fact that she had failed to awaken in his mind one sober thought of the uncertain future. A little time spent in pleasant converse with Mrs. Elton in her room was all the leisure that came to Stella that morning. The weather was very warm, and the baking truly a labor, but at last all was done, the dinner over, and Stella for a few hours was free. She exchanged her wrapper for an appropriate dress, and retired to the quiet parlor for her usual hour's practice.

Mr. Todhunter, who had been waiting impatiently for some time for the sound of the organ, now descended the stairs in full evening costume, and entering her presence, said,

"Miss Stella, may I sue for a favor, a very great favor?"

"Certainly, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Grant me an interview. I have wanted for so long to talk with you."

She replied pleasantly,

"I certainly could have no objection to talking with you, Mr. Todhunter. Pray be seated."

Accompanying his words with one of his most bewitching smiles, he said,

"Miss Stella, when I first met you I thought you a most charming woman, but now, upon further acquaintance, I am sure you are the loveliest creature of your kind that I ever knew."

She answered, pettishly, as she wheeled around on the music stool,

"Do you think I am vain enough to believe that, Mr. Todhunter?"

He caught one of her hands as she laid it on the keys again, and said:

"I assure you I mean it, every word."

She quickly withdrew her hand, and replied,

"Then you are mistaken, sir. You have met many lovelier creatures than I."

"None ever won my heart so entirely. And I came to ask you, lovely angel, to accept my hand and heart. Will you crown my wishes?"

"Mr. Todhunter, you are very precipitate. You cannot mean what you have said, or else you have not given the matter sufficient thought."

"I do mean it, I assure you. I would scorn to trifle with a lady's feelings."

"It is folly for you to think of me in that light, sir. I am not at all suited to you. Let us dismiss the subject."

"By no means, my dear Miss Stella, I admire your sweet modesty and hesitation. I expected it. Ah! I

think I understand you now," and he attempted again to take her hand, but unsuccessfully.

"Indeed, you do not, sir. You misunderstand me utterly."

"My dear young lady do not attempt to mislead me again. I am sure your heart is already mine. Just speak the word that will make me the happiest of men."

"You are terribly mistaken, Mr. Todhunter," she said, warming up a little. "My heart is entirely my own. I have never yet thought of bestowing it on you or anyone else."

This had the effect of cooling his ardor somewhat, but remembering Harry Elton's parting words, "be persistent," he soon recovered courage, and renewed the attack.

"I know, Miss Stella, that you are young. I am willing to make every allowance for youth and inexperience, and even to take the risk of your learning to love me better after a while. This I'm sure you will do. When we are married there shall be no more of this country drudgery. You shall live like a lady, and as becomes the wife of Gustavus Adolphus Todhunter."

She saw that nothing but the plainest words could have any effect upon him, so hoping to cut the matter short, she replied emphatically.

"You are wasting breath, Mr. Todhunter, I never could marry you in the world."

He might have taken this as a rebuff, under ordinary circumstances, but Harry Elton had done his work well. So not at all disconcerted Todhunter continued the siege.

"I cannot for a moment believe that you mean it.

For why could you not marry me? I am sure of your father's consent."

"I was not thinking of my father. I told you the reason a while ago. We are not suited to each other in the least possible degree. After a while you will find some one who is congenial, then you will be glad that I did not take advantage of this offer."

"Now, Miss Stella, you are only talking thus to try me. You cannot mean to reject me. It is only your natural diffidence, a quality so admirable in a lady, that makes you speak so. Let me persuade you to lay that aside, and answer me as I am sure your heart dictates."

Looking him full in the face, she replied with dignity.

"Mr. Todhunter, I have given you my unalterable answer. Please dismiss the subject."

"And you really mean it?"

"Most certainly I do." Then she saw that he was beginning to look disappointed, and her heart softened toward him in an instant. "Mr. Todhunter, I appreciate the compliment you offer me, but why you should have thought about me in this light I cannot imagine. I am not old enough yet to think of marrying. I have been in society but a very short time, not long enough to be able to make such an important selection as you suggest, and I would be doing you and myself a great injustice were I to accept your offer. There is not one thought nor motive in common between you and me, and a marriage would make us both miserable."

"I don't see it so. As I told you, I am willing to make all due allowance for your youth and inexperience in society, and I see no reason why we could not be perfectly happy."

Smiling she answered,

"Mr. Todhunter, you would hardly be happy with a wife for whom you must be continually making allowances."

He was silent a moment, then rallying his forces for a final charge, brought forward his last and strongest argument.

"Miss Stella, do you know that I am rich? That I can make your life very different to what it has been? You shall have your carriage and servants, and I will dress you like a queen. Surrounded by luxury, you will forget that you ever led this life of drudgery that I know is distasteful to you. Situated as you are, you may never have another such offer."

"Very true, sir; but I'm willing to take the risk. In spite of these inducements my mind is unaltered. Rather than be married yet not mated, I would choose my life of drudgery, as you call it, forever. I am perfectly happy."

"Well, Miss Stella," he said as he turned and walked toward the door, "I was encouraged to think that your answer would be different. But you may live to regret it."

"Indeed, Mr. Todhunter, I am very sorry this has happened. Believe me, I would have averted it if I could. You are not angry with me, are you?"

"Oh, no, but you'll rue your obstinacy yet, I know," and the next moment Stella was alone. Conflicting emotions held possession of her mind. She was surprised and indignant. There was no more practice for that afternoon. She leaned her head upon the organ and reconsidered the proceedings of the last hour. She noticed, more than ever, how presistent he had been. Then she recalled this expression, "I was encouraged to think that your answer would be different." What could he mean? Surely she never had

encouraged him in word or deed, but contrariwise, had shown plainly that he had not the slightest hold upon her affection, nor even her respect. She looked at the problem from different standpoints. Finally a light began to break in upon her understanding, and she believed she had found the author of the mischief.

"Harry Elton has done this. I am firmly convinced that he has."

Then surprise and indignation gave place to sorrow and anger, and, full of little human propensities as Stella McMurray was, we are compelled to acknowledge that the latter passion predominated.

Now, among young ladies in general, it is not considered a sad or provoking thing for a young man to propose, no matter whether her answer is to be a yea or a nay. Instead, it is regarded as a pleasant and appropriate thing; something to be repeated by the dear creature (in a confidential whisper of course).

"Mr. So-and-So has proposed. I gave him a flat refusal. I wouldn't tell you, but I know you wouldn't say anything about it for the world."

And so it goes around. But Stella McMurray was not one of this kind. She was a pure, true, warm-hearted, sensible girl, and young as she was, she did not consider this transaction in the light of a conquest, but was heartily sorry that the young man had subjected himself to the mortification of a refusal. And as for Harry Elton, she was positively angry with him, and it did not appease her feelings in the least when her memory recalled a number of instances when he, in a bantering, teasing way, had given the too-easily misled Todhunter to think that she cared for him. Now she knew very well who had encouraged him to expect a different answer. "And he knew so well," she said to herself, "that I would as soon

think of marrying an Egyptian mummy as Mr. Todhunter. I do not thank him for this, and he shall know it. It was unkind to me, and unjust to Mr. Todhunter." On the impulse of the moment she resolved not to see either of the gentlemen again that evening, so she tied on her hat, and walked over to Mr. Preston's and spent the balance of the day with Nina Hudson. Being still somewhat excited over the afternoon's adventure, Stella was unusually lively and talkative. When Morgan came home in the evening and joined the two on the cool portico, he was called upon for a recital of the day's proceedings.

"There's nothing to tell," he promptly responded, "only the fish wouldn't bite. But we didn't insist," he went on to explain, "when we found how exhilarating it was just to lounge in the shade, and how delightful the contents of our lunch basket."

The moon was shining brightly through the trees when Stella bade her friend good-evening, and started home, young Preston accompanying her. It soon became evident that they were in no hurry to reach home. There has ever been a fascination to romantic minds in the gentle beams of the soft, bewitching moonlight. And these young people must be pardoned if they felt just a little more interest in each other than they had ever done before under its benign influence.

When Mr. Preston bade her good-night at her father's door, he did not tarry at all, but retraced his steps with an undefined feeling tugging at his heart as of one who had been tasting a forbidden pleasure. As for Stella, Harry Elton came forward to meet her as she entered the sitting room with a merry smile of welcome on his face, but she remembered her resolu-

tion, and spoke to him coolly, as she proceeded to light her bed-room lamp.

"Are we not going to have your company for the rest of the evening?" he asked.

"No, sir, not this evening. Good-night."

And with a stately nod of her pretty head, she left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning Mr. Todhunter astonished them all by settling his bill and taking the first train for the city. He gave no reason for his sudden departure, and none were asked. But there were two persons besides himself who knew. Yet not a word passed between those two upon the subject that day, for Stella persistently kept aloof from Mr. Elton, and even decoyed Mr. and Mrs. Elton, Sr., into the parlor in the afternoon, during the hour of her musical exercise, to avoid thereby any confidential conversation. And Stella, with an unnecessary assumption of dignity, arose and left the room as soon as her lesson was finished.

And the discomfited Harry wandered up into the orchard, and throwing himself down upon the soft, green grass in the very spot where so recently his fertile brain had concocted the scheme that was now bringing him only regret, muttered to himself,

"Well, I've done it now. Confound the luck. Todhunter has pulled up stakes and gone home in high dudgeon, Stella's all out of sorts, and the mischief's to pay all around. If the fellow had had the discrimination of an oyster, he wouldn't have made such an unmitigated donkey of himself nohow. When I suggest

matrimonial plans to another dude, he'll know it. But I must make it up with Stella some way."

The way did't appear very clear to the young man just then, though, for she had hardly given him a chance to speak to her all day. And in the evening, after tea, she snatched up her bonnet and went over the hill to see Aunt Polly again. She was sitting in her old arm-chair rocking herself as usual, when her visitor darkened the doorway.

"How do you do, Auntie? you see I am as good as my word."

"Yes, honey, I'se jes' been a thinkin' about you. Take this fan, ye look worried."

"Thank you, I walked right fast. I came just to have a talk with you. I am worried, as you said, but it isn't bodily weariness."

"I knowed it, chile, now tell ole Auntie what's the matter."

"I hardly know how to begin. I've been trying lately to be so good—to be better than ever before, and I so longed to do something for the dear Saviour who has done so much for me. And I really imagined that I could, and just then something occurred unexpectedly, something very disagreeable, and, Auntie, before I realized it, I was all wrong. I was encouraging anger and ugly feelings toward others. Now you see, Auntie, my Christian character wouldn't stand even a very slight test."

"Laws, honey, when a builder's jes' began, got de frame up, ye might say, and ain't got no girders nor jists in, nor nuthin' much, it ain't agoin' to take much of a storm to topple it over."

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"De house is like de 'ligious character, chile, it won' stan' de winds and storms till it's done. An' like de

house, it takes time to build it. De Lawd don' 'spect a chile like you is, honey, to be as strong as dem what's been in de way fur a lifetime."

"But I ought to be making some progress. Yet I find I am as easily tempted as I ever was."

"Laws, honey, ye's but a babe in Christ. When yer git more o' de timber on, yer house'll be stronger. All good people's tempted to do wrong sometimes, an' dey hab all yielded at sometime. Jes' look at good ole Peter. He sinned, eben to cussin'. But when he went out an' cried, and sobbed, de Lawd forgive him, an' jes' see how He used him arter dat."

"My sin was as great as that. Oh, with what shame I look back over the day."

"Honey, ye's jes' come to one o' dem rough places what all true Christians fin', an' bein' tuk unawares like, ye jes' stumbled a leetle, dats all. De babe can't walk good when it fust tries. It takes a step, den totters and falls, jes' like you. Now, jes' stretch yer hands up to de lovin' Father an' He'll help ye up."

"Yes, Auntie, I know, but that won't undo the harm I've done. I was trying to set such a good example before one of my friends, one in whom I am very much interested, and now, what must he think of me?"

And she laid her head in her old nurse's lap, where she had carried many a childish sorrow, and wept like a child.

"I sees where de trouble is, honey. Ye's been trustin' too much in your own strength, an' forgot to ask de Lawd for de daily 'sply."

"I believe it. I haven't prayed as much as I ought to have done."

"Go right to de foot ob de cross, honey, and ax de lovin' Master to take ye back into his arms agin, an'

help ye to undo what ye've done that's wrong. He'll neber cast ye away, honey, neber. We'se all got to go through these tribulations and trials, an' if ye'se done wrong dis time, go back and begin agin, an' see dat ye don't stumble in de same place nex' time."

"That is wholesome advice, Auntie. I'm glad I came to you. Now if the Lord will only show me how I can remedy the evil I've done, I will be so glad, and would try to be so careful hereafter. Shall I read something?"

"Please, Miss Stella."

By some chance she opened the book at the second chapter of Hebrews, and when she read the last verse—"For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted"—she received it into her soul as a blessed assurance, and bidding Auntie good-night, started for home.

Now Harry Elton, who had been watching Stella's movements pretty closely, noted her departure from home, and being determined on a reconciliation, had followed at a distance, as far as the broad rock that nearly bridged the stream over which she had to pass. This was a picturesque spot. Here he awaited patiently her return. With some surprise she saw and recognized him as she came down the hill, and coming to the bank, held out both hands, smilingly for his assistance, and said,

"Why, Harry, how came you here?"

"Come, sit down a few moments and I'll tell you. I came to see you. I knew you couldn't get by without giving me a word, and you are doubtless aware of the fact that you are have scarcely noticed me all day. You are very angry with me, aren't you, Stella!"

She looked into his clear, kind, honest eyes, as he

sat there at her feet, and said, with contrition in her voice,

"I have been, Harry, but I am not now. I am very sorry, and sincerely ask your pardon for my unnecessary coolness toward you."

Harry looked up to Stella in perfect amazement.

"What do you mean, Stella? It is I that should apologize, not you, and it was for that that I sought you this evening. I gave you cause to be angry, but you have done nothing for which I could demand any apology."

"Yes, I have, Harry. You did nothing at all so terribly grievous. Yet, I became angry and acted unkindly toward you. Oh, I am so sorry. Harry please do not allow my unchristian-like conduct to cause you to think that religion doesn't help us after all, and that all Christians would have acted as I have done."

For once Harry Elton was perplexed. This interview was progressing so differently to what he had expected.

"Stella, you are blaming yourself unjustly. *I* did wrong—very. I ought not to have persuaded the fellow to do such a thing; but I didn't stop to think that it might displease you, nor of the disagreeable consequences that would follow."

She laughed lightly.

"As for your escapade, Harry, I don't think the consequences will be injurious to anyone. Constitutionally fond of fun, as I know you to be, I can see how almost impossible it was for you to let such a rare chance slip. The one thing that troubles me now is, that you are disgusted, not so much with me, Harry, as with the cause that I so unworthily represent."

"Stella, I wish you wouldn't talk this way. You

overwhelm me with regret that I did such an ungenerous thing. Just give me a plump little scolding, won't you?"

"No, indeed, that is the furthest from my thoughts. If you did wrong, Harry, I, more. If you could but assure me that I have not injured the doctrine that I would defend, my mind would be at ease. But, alas! I sadly fear you cannot."

He took both her hands in his own, and in a low voice answered,

"Stella, dear little sister, be assured that I never more respected or admired the votaries of religion than I do now. And there is solid truth in what it teaches, or you could not have acted the brave little girl that you have."

They arose and started homeward, arm in arm, and she talked to him of the love of Christ as she never did before, and he listened with an attention he had never shown before. An hour later, when Morgan Preston and his cousin came up the steps, Harry Elton and Stella were sitting at the organ, playing and singing that grand old hymn, rich in sentiment and song:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

They stood on the portico, nor made their presence known until the music ceased. The voices of the singers were so sweet, and so perfectly attuned to each other, that there seemed no void in their music. But while endeavoring to teach her some difficult interlude, Harry leaned over and guided Stella's fingers with his own, and a sudden pang shot through young Preston's heart which he endeavored instantly to suppress, but with such poor success that he inwardly almost cursed

himself, Harry Elton, Stella, the organ and everything.

Morgan Preston was a man of such superior strength and self-control, that no human being guessed the secret that was only just beginning to dawn faintly upon his own mental vision.

"When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

The last notes died away in a soft, sweet murmur, and the performer turned around upon her music-stool, and—faced her unexpected audience. Consternation held her silent for an instant, then Stella hastened to welcome her guests. Soon they were conversing in an easy, animated way upon the different topics of the day, and the hours were passing most agreeably, when, by some chance the tide of conversation turned upon a religious subject, and quite naturally, the name of an eminent evangelist, then laboring in Boston, came up, and Stella asked Mr. Preston's opinion of the man and his work. He replied:

"I regard him as an honest, well-meaning enthusiast."

"I hardly understand you. Do you mean to condemn him because, in your opinion, he is an enthusiast?"

"I ought not, I suppose, nor would I, if he did not endeavor to affect the minds of his hearers with feelings akin to his own. But this is a natural law with public speakers."

"Well, Mr. Preston, why shouldn't he? Isn't enthusiasm in the cause of religion a proper feeling? See how enthusiastic men become over political and scien-

tific questions, or even their own little petty financial affairs! And these are the merest trifles when compared with the salvation of immortal souls."

Pleasantly he answered,

"Miss Stella, you place a low estimate upon the mighty problems that are vexing the world to-day. Problems so difficult of solution that they are puzzling the most brilliant minds that the nineteenth century has produced."

"I think not, sir. I plainly recognize the importance of faithful political management, but with all our cavilling we do not reach it. And scientific questions are of vital interest to us all, because when properly adjusted and understood, they will invariably substantiate the teachings of the Bible. But you will admit, I am sure, Mr. Preston, that the work in which Rev Mr. —— is engaged, that of pointing the lost to the 'Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world,' far transcends in importance those that we have mentioned."

"I am sorry that even to please you, Miss Stella, I cannot admit anything of the kind. Do not think harshly of me if I tell you that I opine that mankind would be fully as safe and happy were he to remain at home for the balance of his natural life, and devote his time and talents to the promotion of the well being and happiness of his family."

Astonished she asked quickly,

"Mr. Preston, am I to interpret your remark as prejudicial to this minister alone, or to the cause of religion generally?"

"There is a little difference of opinion between you and me, Miss Stella. Let us not make the breach wider by pursuing the subject further," he pleasantly replied.

"But you will answer me one question, and in asking it I take it for granted that your prejudice concerns Rev. Mr. —— personally. How about the propagation of religion? Who is to do it if not such men as he, who feel it to be their life-work and duty?"

"True religion, the religion of nature, will propagate itself if every man will but study for himself, and learn its law, its causes and effects."

"Please explain a little more clearly what you mean by the religion of nature?"

"That which our own individuality teaches us. Something that can be proven by philosophy and strengthened by nature's plain, legitimate laws."

"And the religion of Jesus Christ—what of that?" she asked in a voice low with pained surprise.

He saw the effect his words were having upon the listener, and laughingly answered.

"Why do you question me so closely, Miss Stella, seeing that we differ so widely? Let us talk about something else, we must say good-night in a very little while. I spent to-day with Sir William Wallace and his lovely Helen Mar. Have you read the 'Scottish Chiefs?'"

"Yes, sir."

"Of course you were pleased?"

"Yes, sir. Miss Porter has made of William Wallace a beautiful character—a rare combination of bravery, fidelity and goodness. Is there anything in his life as presented in that book to encourage you to embrace the doctrine which you profess?"

He laughed again, good humoredly, and said,

"Woman's persistency! You will come back to the forbidden subject."

Presently they arose to go home, the good-nights

were said, and they took their departure, leaving Harry Elton and Stella standing on the portico alone.

"Harry, I am surprised beyond measure," exclaimed Stella, the moment they were out of hearing.

"Why?" he asked.

"That Mr. Preston entertains such horrible ideas of religion."

"Yes, I, too, was surprised, I must confess, to hear him so express himself."

"His parents are earnest Christian people. Where in the world did he fall in with such a doctrine?"

"I cannot tell. 'Tis strange, very strange. Yet I do not know a more thorough gentleman; educated, self-possessed, modest and refined; but his opinions concerning religion are certainly bad, very bad."

"I'm sorry, for I cannot respect him now," she said, "as I could have done if his principles were sound. And such a grief as it must be to his mother. Ah, poor woman, many a heartache will this bring her, and he is her idol, too."

CHAPTER IX.

"Desire has trimmed the sails, and circumstance
Brings but the breeze to fill them."

THE summer is over: the hot, dusty summer, and now it is September—beautiful, bountiful September. But few changes noticeable to the casual observer have taken place with the characters that figure most conspicuously in our story, during the summer months that have just passed. But casual observers know really nothing about us after all. They judge us by what lies on the surface, never dreaming that we laugh and chat sometimes when we long to be alone, that we

may weep and be silent. They cannot peer beyond the impenetrable guise that hides our strongest, purest and best feelings from common inspection. And so, during the long, bright summer months, impressions have been made upon the hearts of some characters, which, although not patent to the indifferent observer, are none the less abiding; impressions so strong and enduring that the course of their whole future lives will be shapen thereby. The pleasure seekers from the city have all drifted back again save young Mr. Elton, who is loth to leave these delightful haunts, with their still more delightful associations. We find him this afternoon with a party of young people attending—not a base-ball, nor a foot-ball game, those intellectual and elevating pastimes that have become so popular among our ambitious young men—but, now don't laugh, attending a *Sunday-school picnic* in the grove adjacent to the church at Waverley Hall. And he is enjoying it, too. It is a sweet, shady place where they have assembled, and the smiling faces of more than a hundred children show their appreciation of the scene. But not the least charming feature of the occasion is the sprightly winning faces of a score or more of young ladies who, with their brothers (or somebody else's brothers) are doing their utmost to make it a time long to be remembered by the children, are distributing among them bountiful supplies of that which satisfieth the inner cravings of human nature, interspersing the occasion with music, and, at intervals, snatches of conversation. But we would have it distinctly understood that this latter by-play was not for the benefit of the children. Here among these charitable young people we find, also, Morgan Preston, Stella McMurray and Nina Hudson. The two latter were sitting together, somewhat remote from anyone

else, talking of events as they transpired around them. Harry Elton was seated at the organ, playing a spirited brilliant piece of music for the amusement of his juvenile acquaintances. The melody was quick, and warbling, and thrilling, like the notes of a bird, and the two young ladies as they listened, commented, naturally enough, first upon the performance, then the performer. Stella said in her honest, straightforward way,

"I certainly do admire Mr. Elton greatly, and his stay with us this summer has been a great advantage to me."

"In what way?" asked her companion.

"In every way, I think," was the thoughtful reply. "He has taught me, conversationally, something of life outside the narrow sphere in which I have observed it. He has travelled a good deal and occupies a social position which admits him into a circle of which I only read. Yet he adapts himself readily to surroundings, and is a delightfully modest, unassuming companion. Do you not admire him?"

"Yes, rather," hesitatingly.

Impulsive Stella answered quickly,

"Such an answer is equivalent to saying that you don't like him at all."

"Oh, no; I *do* like him for some things."

"Some things? What are they?"

"Well," laughing, "he is pleasant to talk to, and to look at."

"Ah! well, now, would you mind telling me what you object to?"

"To be honest with you, Stella, I think he has no depth of character. To use a common phrase, he is trifling."

"That's it, is it? Don't mistake yourself, Miss

Hudson," replied the little champion. "If you knew him as well as I do, you wouldn't say that. His manner is blithe and merry as a child, but his principles are sound and true as steel. For what he professes to be—a moralist—he has no superior among my acquaintances."

"I hope I am mistaken instead of you. Certainly he doesn't impress me as a man who has a definite, earnest purpose in life."

"Reared in the lap of luxury, Nina, as he has been, nothing has occurred to develop those strong qualities that are there, I know, if circumstances should ever call them into action."

Nina smiled incredulously and said,

"There is resolution, and honesty, and truth personified, as near as I have ever seen it in a man."

She pointed to Morgan Preston, surrounded by a group of children, his handsome face beaming with smiles and good nature. One little roguish-eyed girl climbed up in his arms and looked triumphantly down upon the others, who had gathered as close about him as they could. He was giving them apples and cake, and telling them fairy stories. A happier little group was not in the grove. Stella looked at the pretty picture some moments before she spoke, then said, as if speaking to herself,

"What a hideous deformity he carries in his heart."

"What do you mean, Stella?"

"You surely are not ignorant of the fact that Morgan Preston is an infidel, are you, Nina?"

Nina's face flushed a little as she replied,

"He has imbibed false notions, but I think he will soon see the folly of them."

"Not if he is that resolute, determined man that he seems, and that you represent him. Now, Nina, while

you are so critically pointing out the flaws in Mr. Elton's disposition, just tell me what greater blot there could be on a man's character than the name of infidel."

"But, Stella, Morgan's obnoxious opinions are acquired, and may, by good influence and surroundings, be removed; while Mr. Elton's failings are innate, natural, a part of the man's very self."

"For the greater part, Nina, they only exist in your imagination." Then, as if ready to dismiss the subject, she added, "When Mr. Preston completely changes his views we will compare the two men."

"Stella, be careful that you don't think too uncharitably of Morgan. There are circumstances that tend to palliate his error. While away at school he met with and read, through curiosity at first, infidel books, formed acquaintances who believed such theories, and having there no Christian influence thrown around him, he read and listened until he believes all that the infidel writers say."

"How could Morgan so soon forget his strict religious home-training?"

"There's the difficulty, Stella. His parents were not strict, but lax in their discipline. When a child, at home, he selected his own reading, and followed his own judgment in almost everything. Having no pernicious literature within his reach at home, they did not foresee anything of this kind. His parents are bitterly grieved."

"I pity them sincerely. Just see how attractive he is to those little ones. How eagerly they gather about him and listen to his stories. Oh, if he were only a Christian."

"That is his only fault. I know him thoroughly. A more thoughtful, loving, tender son there could not

be. Honorable, kind and courteous in every respect."

"I do not doubt it, but while he bears that terrible blight on his moral escutcheon, I, for one, cannot make of him an intimate friend."

"Think again, Stella. Is that the way to retain those that have wandered? Will standing off and letting him alone make of him a better man?"

Stella laughed.

"You worsted me that time, I'll admit. I'd rescue him if I could, but certainly I cannot regard him in the same light that I did before I knew this."

Just then Harry Elton came up and said, pleasantly,

"I am sorry to interrupt you, ladies; but, Stella, we are requested to sing a duet. We must not refuse, must we?"

"Oh, no; certainly not."

So the three walked off together. Stella played and the two sang together, just as they had often done before; but during this act another pretty little tableau was spoiled. Mr. Preston, as soon as his eyes wandered in the direction of the singers, hastily, but not rudely, put the child from him that was sitting on his knee, and saying gently to the little group,

"There, now, children, run to your seats," got up, and with a scowl on his face and defiance in his step, pulled his hat down over his eyes and walked away in the opposite direction. When he had gone quite out of range of the party, he threw himself on the ground at the foot of a large tree, supported his head on his elbow, pulled his hat over his face in order to exclude the saucy sunbeams, and remained in this most unsociable position until the festivities ceased, then, after everyone else had gone, took himself home at his

leisure. But, according to Agathon, "It is a part of probability that many improbable things will happen." Glancing up at the open window as he drew near the house, he gave a start of surprise as he saw the faces of the two whom he had been seeking to avoid.

It was only momentary, though, and a moment later he entered the parlor, the same affable, cultivated gentleman that we always find him. A few pleasant hours soon sped away, and again Mr. Preston raised his eyebrows in mute amazement when, after Nina had yielded to Stella's request to walk a part of the distance homeward with them, Mr. Elton quietly offered his arm to Nina and walked away with her without so much as a "By your leave, miss," to Stella.

"Mr. Elton has left you no choice, Miss Stella," he said, as he offered his arm to her, and followed them.

"No, sir," she replied, "and I am glad that you have no advantage over me. Had there been another young lady I would probably have been compelled to walk home alone, or worse, to have acted in the capacity of the intruding third party."

"Perhaps not." Then in a tone of voice a little harder, said, "You are not very exacting or you would not allow this."

"Allow what?"

"Mr. Elton to lend his escort to another lady right before your eyes. They really assume an interest in each other, too."

"Why shouldn't he, Mr. Preston? Surely I wouldn't think of trying to restrain him."

"Isn't there a possibility of being too amiable?" Then fearing that she might take his words literally, he hastened to say, "But he is in excellent company,

Miss Stella, and will not be drawn from his allegiance in the least."

She saw that he did not understand her, but she did not know why, and said,

"You spoke of *assuming* interest in each other, is there not something in each of them that should *really* attract the other?"

"Under different circumstances, yes; but as they now exist, why ask such a question?" he replied, for it really did seem a strange question to him.

"Because a sudden light is breaking in upon my mind. What blind creatures we are. He is unmistakably attractive."

He was startled at her words, but answered with his usual self-possession.

"Miss Stella, I am sure you have not the smallest ground for distrust. I was only jesting when I caused the conversation to take the turn that it has."

She was surprised at his earnestness, and he at her coolness, and, as is often the case, they entirely misunderstood each other, wondered a little, and passed on.

"Mr. Preston," said she, after a moment's silence, "I have something to ask you. We'll call it an ethical question, and I want a very frank answer."

"You shall certainly have it," he replied, "that is, if I comprehend your question."

"Suppose you had a friend between whom and yourself there existed a genuine friendship, and that friend entertained among a host of noble principles, one perfectly abhorent to you, and so deadly in its tendencies as ultimately to result in his ruin—would you avoid the subject or try to turn him from his error?"

"There is but one answer, Miss Stella. I would

not be his friend did I not warn him of his danger and seek to save him."

"I agree with you precisely. Now, Mr. Preston, that is just the position that I hold toward you."

"Toward me? You astonish me. Am I really in such a dangerous state as that?"

"My friend, your soul, the immortal part of your nature, is in imminent peril. More than that, while entertaining the opinions that you do, you are dwarfing your capabilities, and to make the best even of this brief life, will be impossible."

"All this because I venture to believe with the minority, those who are seeking for absolute truth?"

"Mr. Preston, are you earnestly seeking for truth? I would like to emphasize every word in the question."

"I understand you. Yes, Miss Stella, I am earnestly seeking for truth. Not a theory, no matter how bewitching, but a bald truth. Something knowable, and that can be proven."

"Then, sir, if you are seeking an honest explanation of a question, of course you must consider equally both sides of that question. Isn't that logic?"

"Yes."

"And the question with you is simply this, Is the Bible true? Now, Mr. Preston, in order to get a satisfactory solution of this question, what have you been reading?"

He cleared his throat a little uneasily, and named several books written by Hume, Paine, and others.

"All those books hold that the Bible is untrue," she said. "Now what did you read in defense of it? 'Watson's Apology' or 'Butler's Analogy,' or what?"

"I must answer, nothing in that line."

"Then you have only considered one side of the question, and you have already admitted that that is

not the way to reach an honest conclusion. Now, have you read the Bible itself carefully?"

He winced a little but answered,

"Yes, Miss Stella, I have read it. It teaches among other things that through the mediation and death of a supernatural character, whom they call Christ, I may be admitted into a future state of bliss. But how am I to know, certainly, that such a man as Christ ever lived? There is no other detailed account of his life besides that given in the Bible."

"Do you believe there ever lived a man whom they called Julius Cæsar?"

"Certainly."

"Why?"

"Because reliable history teaches it.

"Or in other words, somebody else has said so. If the existence of Christ upon earth has not been proven beyond the possibility of doubt, then no fact in history has. Witnesses many and reliable have attested it. You have no more right to impeach their testimony than that of those men who have handed down to us the account of the life of Julius Cæsar. And not New Testament statements only, which comes to us in the days of well-authenticated history, but even in the Old Testament, wherever we find anything touching upon ancient history it is accepted as strictly reliable by the most eminent scholars of today."

"But we have the account of Cæsar's life from various authors, while the life of Christ comes from but one source. Why did not other writers take up this wonderful life?"

"At that time, and for generations afterward, that would have been a dangerous thing to do. His pure doctrine and holy life upset the pet theories of the

religious teachers of his day, and He was very unpopular. Those men who stood up in defense of his doctrine, and believed in his divinity, took, everyone, his life in hand. No author of standing would hazard his reputation and his life by taking up a theme that met with such universal disfavor. But the Bible gives us all the information we need about the life, crucifixion and ascension of Christ. If you will study it, Mr. Preston, without prejudice, you will find within its pages that which will lead you into a happy and useful life."

"Yes, Miss Stella, if I believed it as unquestionably as you."

"Bishop Foster, in one of his flights of eloquence, says: 'It is impossible to divest the mind of theological thought. No man is a sufficiency for himself. The entire universe of things is not sufficient. The highest conceivable bliss, endlessly extended, but excluding God, is not sufficient. He must have God. He can construct no ideal destiny that includes not despair if God be left out. The vast splendor is a mockery. He roams amid its magnificence, gnawed with unappeased hunger, driven about from rim to rim of its empty grandeur in quest of that which is not, and which it cannot give. Empty of God it is no palace for him. His very sin demands an altar of confession. His woe will have an Ear into which it must pour its anguish. His helplessness creates an Omnipotence for its refuge. His incommunicable secrets are a burden he cannot bear until he finds One who reads them. He will have God. It is the deepest necessity his soul experiences. He might endure exile from the society of his fellow-men, might subsist in a dungeon, might even cling to life though banished to some lonely and desolate spot, where neither man nor beast would

afford him companionship—a gloom of solitude where he should hear no voice—a very desert of death—alone, helpless, friendless, joyless—he might endure all this and yet live; but he must have God. In that desert he will build an altar. Out of that awful silence he will send up a prayer. The necessity is in the nature of man. Does it mean nothing?' What say you, Mr. Preston?"

"Your quotation, Miss Stella, is a very fine flight of eloquence, as you have said, but the picture is very much overdrawn. I find that men have lived, and peacefully died, without believing as Bishop Foster does."

She was silent a moment, and then said, eagerly and earnestly,

"Oh, if I could only convince you of your error! How you are jeopardizing that precious possession, your immortal soul, and toying with your eternal destiny. But no amount of argument will do it."

Instinctively she clasped both hands upon his arm and looking up into his face said pleadingly,

"Why do you persist in this wilful blindness? Why not leave off theorizing and reading books and treatises which teach that God is only a great First Cause, a something whose work was done ages and ages ago, and that the vicarious death and the atonement of Christ is only an overdrawn story, and read the simple, plain evidences of the existence of a merciful, loving, and all-wise Father, that are so apparent, all about and beneath and around you? Goodness and forbearance and love have surrounded you all along through life, and to-night those beautiful, brilliant lamps that God has hung out in the sky, but faintly typify all the brightness and fulness of the love and mercy with which your Heavenly Father regards you

Why not yield while God lovingly pleads with you, and not wait until in his just anger He smites you?"

He looked down into the sweet, upturned face, so sincere in its expression, laid his hand just for an instant, upon the two that clapsed his arm, but he said not a word. They now had reached the gate, and as he did not reply, she said in a voice low with intensity,

"Mr. Preston, mine is not a blind faith, I *know* in whom I believe. No earthly consideration could purchase from me the assurance of my acceptance with God; the knowledge that I am adopted to his family; that Jesus is *my* Saviour, my ever-watchful, loving Friend. Oh! I entreat you, come out of the darkness into the light. There is no pleasure in your belief. Nothing but annihilation and darkness at which our whole nature revolts. But in mine there is light and happiness and immortality. Won't you come out of your world into mine?"

"Whenever I can with honesty accept your views, Miss Stella, I will. At present I cannot."

The others were waiting for them on the porch, the friends spoke a hearty good-night, Nina took her cousin's arm, and started homeward, and Harry and Stella, as conversation seemed rather constrained on both sides, soon said good-night. Half an hour later Morgan Preston sat in his easy-chair by his chamber window, and while myriads of bright, golden stars smiled down upon him, and the shadows from the rustling leaves outside played fantastic freaks upon his sober thoughtful face, mused thus with himself,

"Why is she thrown constantly near me? I've sought to avoid her to-day, and I've done it with a vengeance. Here I am, positively in love, no shirking it now, with this plain, unpretending, bewitching little

country girl, whom I have known ever since she was a child. And she is engaged to another.

'Am I mad that I should cherish that which bears but bitter fruit?
I will pluck it from my bosom though my heart be at the root.'

Why cannot I feel this way toward Lilian Martin? She's a sweet little girl, and I guess it's no harm to tell you, Morgan Preston, and I know you'll keep my secret, I could get her for the asking. Rich, too, and as I am not burdened with money myself that would be no obstacle. Well, I'll harden my heart and keep away from Miss McMurray. That's what I'll do, and I can do it as well as not. Poor little thing! how steadfastly she believes her pretty delusion."

After a while, thoroughly disgusted with the unsatisfactory state of things, he threw himself upon his bed. Although he had creditably determined within himself to think no more about his interesting neighbor, his dreams assumed a form that was very much calculated to burden him in keeping his resolutions. Stella McMurray's face and figure flitted in and out before his vision, while Harry Elton's provokingly musical voice somewhere in the dim distance was continually weaving strains of bewitching melody.

The sun was shining in at his window when Morgan woke from his fitful sleep.

"Have I kept you waiting, mother?" he asked pleasantly when he descended to the breakfast room.

"Only a little while, dear," she replied.

"I sat up late last night and overslept as a natural result. Where's father?"

"Father ate early and went down to the station."

"Did he? Well, mother, I am thinking of going to B—— this afternoon."

"What, dear? I thought you were not going until next week," she replied.

"That was my first plan, but I would rather go now unless you really object. And if I do not come back for a month or so, mother, would you care?" he asked.

"Oh, that seems so long, Morgan. We are very lonely, your father and I. You know you are all we have, dear."

The mother's voice was soft and tender.

"Very well, mother, I'll come every alternate Saturday. I can do it as well as not."

"Did you want much to stay, Morgan?"

"Oh, not so very much," assuming a careless manner. "It is pleasant to know that even such an entertaining young lady as Nina cannot entirely fill my place."

"I could hardly hope to do that," retorted Nina.

"What are you going to do with yourself to-day, coz?"

"Write letters this morning, and this afternoon I promised to go out with Stella."

He asked no further questions, but arose from the table, and stepping behind his mother's chair, took her face between his hands and kissed her affectionately, then ran upstairs to his room. Having closed the door he took down "Vestiges" from the shelf, opened it, and laid it on his knee. Then looking out the window, muttered:

"That will always be the way—always her name. If mother only knew! But she never shall. And as for me, I can conquer my silly self just as well by coming home as staying away. But this is not doing it," and he fell to reading with stolid determination.

An hour later his mother entered the room, and

looking over his shoulder read the title of the book he was so intently perusing, This sentence headed the page, and it was all she waited to read:

"There *may be* behind the screen of nature a system of mercy and grace which is to make up for all casualties endured here, and the very largeness of which makes these casualties a matter of indifference to God."

She did not like the phraseology, and said in a voice of sadness,

"My son, if you would only give up this line of reading and thought, how different your life would be."

"Why, mother, my life is a delightful one."

"But after this—what then?"

"Well, I don't know. I don't think any one does to a positive certainty."

She laid her trembling hand on his and said,

"Oh, Morgan, throw it all away—all these vain and foolish theories that you have so carefully sifted from science and metaphysics. They will be swept from you some day like chaff before the wind. What will science be to you if you lose your precious, undying soul?"

"Well, mother, where is the utility of a religious theory that will not stand the test of argument? We are reasoning beings, and we want something more than emotional feeling."

"Oh, my son, how many thousand times would I rather have raised you in ignorance and made you a good, conscientious, Christian man, than to have given you all the advantages of education and made you a sceptic. What a mistake we have made!"

"Does education make men sceptical, mother?"

"No, Morgan; by no means. But in your individ-

ual case you fell in with literature that did not really pertain to your studies, and which you would not have found at home. With a mind unfortified by the love of God, young and easily moulded, the influence of those pernicious books over you has been to strengthen you with arguments for a false and fatal doctrine; while the teachings of the Holy Scriptures you have not studied at all."

"Oh, yes, mother, I read the Bible, and I have heard it expounded from the pulpit from my youth up. Now don't worry over my perverseness. I hope I may never do anything that will cause you to blush for me."

"My son, if you were a wilful murderer, and believed in the atonement of Christ, there would be less to fear than now, for you might repent, be forgiven, and saved at last. But if you disbelieve in God, you must inevitably be lost."

"But suppose I lead such a correct life there will he nothing to punish me for, what then?"

"You cannot. Such a belief as you foster will blacken every act of your life, however pure they might otherwise be. Oh, my son, you don't know how my heart aches for you. Do not let me carry this great sorrow with me to the grave. Learn of Jesus and let Him cleanse you from this sin. Satan and his co-workers are deceiving you."

"Surely your influence and example, mother, ought to lead me right," he said in a conciliating tone.

"But you are not guided, my kind, noble, generous boy. How can I give you up to believe a lie, and be separated from me forever?"

"Well, there, mother, don't let us talk about it any more to-day. I am going away after a while, you know. Let us talk about something else."

"Morgan, I never broached this subject to you before, but in the few months that I have known your error, my heart has been full—oh, *so* full—of sorrow. Son, won't you promise me to repent?"

"Mother," his tone was full of earnestness, "you would not have me promise to do that which I cannot do honestly?"

"Then will you read this book? I have read it many times." She took from her pocket a copy, well-worn, of the New Testament, and handed it to him. "Will you read it?"

"Yes, mother, I'll read it."

"And I'll pray for you, that God may enlighten your mind and make it the instrument of your salvation. God always has heard me, and I believe He will in this, sometime."

She stooped and pressed her lips to his forehead, and left the room. He put the book in his breast pocket—a strange companion for an infidel—leaned back in his chair and sat thinking. After all there was nothing tangible in his meditations; only a listless look of weariness and sad unrest, in the luminous, soft, blue eyes that looked far, far away, beyond the sunny, bright landscape, yet saw nothing. That evening found him in B—— going over his medical books with a zeal he had never evinced before.

CHAPTER X.

"But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."—Luke viii. 15.

"STELLA," said Harry Elton, one afternoon as the two sat together on the porch, he holding a skein of

cotton which she was winding into a ball, "do you know what Morgan Preston reminded me of the other evening when he walked with you to to the gate?"

"I cannot imagine."

"Well, he reminded me forcibly of a picture I saw once of a little urchin who had been stealing apples from a gentleman's garden. It appears that the gardener spied him, and showed a spirit of revenge, and the little fellow with his spoils jumped over the garden wall, and, while still hanging by his hands to the wall, discovers a savage dog chained right beneath him. And there hangs the culprit between two great evils, his mind not made up which to face, and no time to make it in. Judging from his expression on that evening I would suppose Preston to be in a similar predicament. I scarcely ever saw such a woe-begone face as he carried away with him, and I reckon that you were at the bottom of it."

"I'm sure I don't know why he should look like that."

"Of course not. Women never know what makes a man look miserable."

"Some of them are naturally so disagreeable that they can't look any other way."

"But such cases are rare," spoken with such a comical twang to his voice that Stella laughed heartily. "Come, now, tell me what unpleasant things you said to Preston to leave such a rueful expression on his visage."

"Nothing unpleasant that I know of, Harry. But I can tell you what we were talking about if you think it necessary that you should know."

"It's absolutely necessary," with another amusing grimace.

"Well, I was simply trying to urge upon him the propriety of relinquishing his sceptical views."

"Was that it?" and his face at once assumed a more thoughtful expression. "How did you succeed, Stella?"

"He said nothing that would lead me to believe that my words made the slightest impression."

"Probably he thinks more than he would like to acknowledge."

"Harry, I believe he thinks himself honest in his unholy belief."

"I can hardly credit any one's honesty in such an opinion. It strikes me as willful blindness in this enlightened age. And I am sorry, truly sorry, for the fellow seems to have no other fault."

"But that's such a hideous one. Indeed, I thought once, Harry, that I would avoid him as much as possible. Do you think it would be right?"

"For you to avoid him? No, it would not be right. He can do you no harm; he cannot shake your belief, and indeed I don't believe he wishes to; and you might do him a great deal of good."

"But, Harry, I will fear to approach him again on the subject. He is very gentlemanly, yet so invulnerable. Indeed, I fear that only some serious dispensation of Providence will soften his obdurate heart."

"It isn't all in talking, Stella. Defend your doctrine, of course, if it comes in the way, but a quiet, consistent, Christian example is the most convincing argument after all. I don't want to flatter you—you know me better than to think so—but your unpretending simplicity, your quiet, gentle, firm demeanor, has done more toward making me feel that I ought to be a better man than all the sermons I have heard this summer."

The very solemnity of his words caused the warm blood to surge up to her temples, and she said,

"Oh, Harry, how I thank Our Father if He has allowed me to help you ever such a little. How carefully I ought to live, and yet I forget so often."

"You do not need that I should caution you to carefulness, but I do say that you ought not to withhold your influence from anyone however slight it may seem to you. You do not know whom you may help to do right."

"I thank you for what you have said, Harry, and will try to profit by it. And I sincerely hope that before long you may become an active, zealous Christian. I am deeply interested for you."

"Why, Stel, I haven't said so much as 'confound it!' for two weeks," spoken with an air of drollery which he invariably assumed after talking seriously just as long as he intended to; and Stella, keenly alive to the ridiculous, could not for the life of her keep from laughing.

"Indeed, Harry, you make me ashamed of myself," she said. "You never talk so earnestly but you make me laugh in the very midst of it. You know you ought not to have used that tone."

"Seeing as I have that tone—it's among my natural gifts and graces—I thought it was my duty to use it."

"It wasn't your duty to make me laugh just then."

"I cannot hold myself responsible for your risibilities."

"Now, seriously, if you can, Harry, is it such a sacrifice to leave off saying ugly words?"

"Yes, it is a sacrifice. I only cite it as one little instance of reformation."

"You will have greater deeds of self-denial to perform than that in life."

"I may; but these little daily habits are the hardest to shake off. I can give up indulgences that only come occasionally with much more ease to myself than those that I daily look for from force of habit."

"There's strength in your argument, and I surrender without further words. If you are the magnanimous conqueror that I take you to be, you will not require me to hand over my arms; or, in other words, to hold my tongue in the future."

"I make no such requirements. You'll doubtless be engaged in many other wordy wars. Don't girls quarrel among themselves right often?"

"I think not."

"I noticed a couple of young ladies in the grove a few evenings ago, who, judging from their gestures and significant nods and glances, were not agreeing precisely on some important subject."

"Nina and I were differing a little wee bit, but I'm sure we did not make ourselves so conspicuous as you intimate."

"I say, Stella, has Miss Hudson any serious admirers?"

"None but you, that I am aware of."

"Such sagacity and foresight I have seldom seen equalled and never surpassed, and they must not fail of their reward."

And regardless of perspective hose, the unwound cotton dropped to the floor, and he seized both of her plump little hands and kissed them vehemently. While he was thus rewarding her, the ball rolled down the steps, and Stella, drawing her hands away and trying to look indignant, said,

"Harry, you are *so* provoking. See, you are tangling the cotton dreadfully. What will mother say? Go down the steps now, and get the ball."

"Certainly. Henceforth I am your abject slave; only command me. Your mother won't say a word when she finds how it happened. You know it wasn't premeditated."

"That doesn't alter the case. You should be more dignified. I don't like it."

"Now these are three distinct propositions. You are wrong in the very outset. A fellow doesn't come under condemnation for acting upon sudden provocation that way, as he would if he were to do the same in cold blood. I'll submit that to any practitioner. Now we came to the second proposition. Well, I wasn't constituted with an over-abundance of dignity. As to the third, Stel, I think if you'd try you might learn to like it. Don't you think so?"

"No; and more than that, you wouldn't do so if I were Nina Hudson, or anyone else."

The skein was all straight now, and the ball nearly finished. He looked searchingly in her face to see if she really was provoked with him, and answered,

"I believe that is so, Stella. I don't want to be prim and dignified with you. No one else seems to me like a dear little sister as you do, and I respect and love you just as much as if you were my own sister. Now, you are not angry with me, are you?"

Looking into his open, frank face, she knew that he spoke in all sincerity and truth, and she replied, smiling,

"No, Harry, I am not angry with you, and strange to say, I don't think I ever could be."

"There's a dear little girl. Now, I think we have established a lasting peace, and I don't want more little border wars. I'm going away next week. Don't you think it's time?"

"I cannot tell. You know better than I; but we will be very sorry to see you go."

"That is very pleasant to hear, and if I were not very reluctant to go, I should have gone long ago."

"It has been a very short summer to me, Harry. Now, our work is done. Accept my thanks for your generous assistance." She held the ball in her hands.

"You're just as welcome as you are thankful. You can probably come at the amount better than I can. Can I take any message from you to Tod?"

"No; not for me, certainly."

"Don't you think you had better recall your decision?"

"I have not yet regretted it. Perhaps he has already found the lucky woman who is to occupy that home of wonderful dimensions."

"It is positively distressing to see young ladies throw away good chances like that."

"Young men, too, sometimes stand in their own light. I do not know when you will meet with Nina Hudson's equal again."

"Probably never. I can't pretend to say."

"Candidly, Harry, don't you think she is a superior young lady?

"I do." He looked down and caught her keen, questioning glance, and laughed merrily. "Any more catechetical observations?"

But before Stella had time to reply, her mother came to the door and said,

"Come, daughter, you're wantin' in the kitchen. It don't make no odds about that cotton. You needn't have wound it. I'm only heelin' and toein'. Get your big apron, I want you to skin them tomats. I am goin' to can some this evenin'."

Stella arose immediately and followed her mother

into the kitchen, and Mr. Elton went upstairs to his room, "spruced himself up a little," as Mrs. McMurray expressed it, and went over to Mr. Preston's and spent the evening. The few intervening days soon sped away, and the last evening of his stay came. He and Stella had sung together, and now they were having their good-by chat, for he would leave very early in the morning. "Stella," he said, "I intend to prove to you that my summer with you and your kind friends has been not only pleasant but profitable. I came to you a perfect stranger, but I leave a steadfast friend. And you shall see that your good advice has not been wasted. I am no longer a helpless, aimless man, drifting through life, uncertain as to where the current may bear me; but truly sorry for the life that I have led, and the time that I have wasted, I have given to God the balance of my days, and He has given to me a satisfying peace that I have never known before."

"I am truly glad—oh, I cannot tell you how glad I am to hear you speak so. Be true to your heart, and its convictions of duty, and he will use you, in some way, for our good and His glory,"

"It was a very imperfect heart that I brought Him, Stella, but He has given me a positive consciousness that He accepts my offering. Naturally fond of ease and gayety, I expect to find it up-hill business for a while to conform my life to a religious standard. But the Master I am trying to serve will help me. I expect to see you again before many weeks, then I will tell you what progress I am making."

Then they spoke of their hopes and intentions, and many a pleasant time they planned for the future. Children as they are, they forget that,

"Life has many a tangled crossing,
Joy has many a break of woe,
And the cheeks, tear-stained, are whitest;
This the blessed angels know."

They see but the brightness and the sunshine; the rose-hued and joy-tinted. No gloom, no shadows. They forget the heartaches, the pains and disappointments; things fondly hoped for that we never realize; days confidently expected that never come. But God knows. Well for us if we can place our hand in His and walk confidingly on through darkness as well as light, through shadow as well as sunshine.

CHAPTER XI.

"Light after darkness, gain after loss,
Strength after weakness, crown after cross,
Sweet after bitter, song after sigh,
Home after wandering, praise after cry.

Sheaves after sowing, sun after rain.
Sight after mystery, peace after pain,
Joy after sorrow, calm after blast,
Rest after weariness, sweet rest at last.

Near after distant, gleam after gloom,
Love after loneliness, life after tomb,
After long agony, rapture of bliss,
Right was the pathway leading to this."

GENTLY, soothingly, fell the sweet, low voice upon the ears of the suffering invalid, and with hungry eagerness she drank in the comforting sentiment of the song. The place was the rude dwelling where Aunt Polly lived who was now a bedridden invalid; and Stella McMurray was the singer. Outside the humble dwelling there was another listener upon whom the

music produced a different effect. Morgan Preston had approached the door; but upon hearing the voice from within, stopped, listened and hesitated. He recognized the voice at once; and, on the instant, decided to go on without entering; took a few steps in the direction of home, then stopped, and said to himself,

"This is cowardly. What do I care? I'll go in; of course, I will."

In another moment he had opened the door and stood inside. His entrance was as much of a surprise to Stella as her voice had been to him. It was the first time she had seen him for more than a month, and and probably there was more pleasure in the quick smile of recognition that she gave him, and the slightly heightened color on her cheek than she had really meant to convey. However, if it had been her intention to lead him to think she was glad to see him (and we know it was not) her attempt would still have been a failure, for he did not for one instant think that his coming caused her any pleasure. He greeted each occupant of the room pleasantly and said,

"I am glad to find you so well entertained, Aunt Polly," then placing a paper of oranges on the table near her, said, "I hope you will enjoy these also."

"How kind of you to bring them," spoke impulsive Stella, but when the recipient essayed to thank him, he interrupted her by saying.

"There, Auntie, you know I don't want you to be too profuse in your thanks."

He threw himself into a chair and commenced fanning himself vigorously with his hat.

"I know ye don't, honey. Ye'se so proud, Mr. Morgie, ye raaly don't want me to thank ye. But I does pray to de good Lawd to take up his abode in your kind, feelin' heart."

"Oh, don't flatter," he said, laughing. You know I never take kindly to that."

"I ain't got no time for flatterin', honey. It's a gettin too skace. If ye only had the grace o' God in yer heart, Mr. Morgie. It's all ye need."

"Why, Auntie, I do the best I know. I do no harm to anyone intentionally."

"Dat don't 'mount to nuffin' while ye don't love Jesus. Ye *must* love him, Mr. Morgie. He bought ye wid his own bressed life. Oh, honey, if I could only pick ye up in my po', feeble arms, like I'se done many a time when yo' was a little baby, an' carry ye to de cross o' Christ, what a bressed privilege I'd count it."

The outlook was rather ominous for the young man, so he cleared his throat and endeavored to change the subject.

"You haven't asked me about my work in the city, Auntie. Why, I've seen and questioned more sick people than a few since I saw you last. And prescribed, too, in unimportant cases." And laughing he said, "I always gave something that I knew couldn't hurt them. But after all, who knows but that I'll be famous, after a while, for curing all manner of diseases."

"What shall it profit a man if he gain de whole world an' lose his own soul?"

"Oh, I see there's no escape from a lecture. Really, Auntie, I think five lectures in a week are as many as I can properly digest. Please let me off on Saturdays."

"I don't want to 'noy ye, honey, but I'se so worked up for ye. 'Pears like I don' want to go to de oder world widout carryin' de news to de bressed Saviour dat ye'se washed in His blood. I'se in sight ob de

riber, honey, an' de nearer I comes to de sho' de brighter de light streams across."

"You are a brave woman, Auntie," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Morgie, good an' kind an' thoughtful as ye'se always been to me, ye don' give my Saviour de credit for nuffin'. It's Him dat comforts and strengthens me now, chile. Widout de 'ligion ob Jesus I'd be a po', shrinkin', frightened mortal beggin' to live an' fearin' to die. It's 'ligion that does it, honey. Why *can't* ye believe it?"

"Oh, I'm a disagreeable, obstinate sort of a fellow, I guess."

"Are ye goin', Miss Stella?" noticing that Stella was tying on her hat.

"Yes, Auntie, time's up, as father says."

Mr. Preston also arose, and said politely,

"If you'll allow me, Miss Stella, I'll walk with you."

She nodded her assent, they spoke their adieux and went together; the one, her heart all aglow with an ardent, earnest love for God, her life almost a continued hymn of praise; the other, a blind devotee to a cold "First Cause," which neither he, nor anyone else, ever could define, and leave out God.

It was a lovely November afternoon. An Indian summer day—all quiet calm and hazy. The sky overhead presented one beautiful, uninterrupted arch of pale, dreamy blue, and the bright sunlight came filtering down through masses of delicately tinted leaves of every imaginable hue, touched by the early frosts of autumn. And in the rocky glen through which their pathway lay, the

"Yellow lichens colored all the clime,
Like moonlit battlements and towers decayed by Time."

Doubtless each nature-loving soul was observant of the beauties with which she had decked herself, but neither made any comment thereon. Stella was the first to break the silence.

"You gave me a surprise by your unceremonious appearance this afternoon."

"Did I? I knew you were inside the house before I entered."

"By what intuition?"

"I recognized your voice."

"Oh, yes; I was singing. Well, I think I have unravelled what has been to me a mystery for months."

She looked up quizzically into his face to see if he understood her meaning. But he only said in his usual way,

"If I am not inquisitive, may I ask what has puzzed you?"

"This: Often upon entering Aunt Polly's door, I have found that some one has been there playing the part of the Good Samaritan. Several times I asked her to tell me who brought certain delicacies; but she would say, 'I'd love to tell ye, but he made me promise not to tell nobody.' I think I know now. They came from the same source that the oranges did."

He answered, evasively,

"That is only a supposition."

"Unless you meet it with a denial, I will accept it as a certainty. Now, tell me. Have you not brought her many an offering such as you did to-day?"

"Well, if I have, it is of no moment."

"Yes, sir, it is. There is a book that says, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto Me.'"

"Just let it pass, then, as one of the very few com-

mendable things I have ever done, and we'll talk of something else."

"No, sir; excuse me, but I don't want to talk of something else. There are two questions I wish to ask you. May I?"

"Certainly."

His lips compressed, and his face darkened.

"You do not believe in revealed religion, yet I find you doing exactly what the Bible teaches. Visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the destitute with kind words and substantial alms-giving. Tell me what prompts you to do this?"

"The cause of common humanity prompts me, Miss Stella, or, if you choose, simple morality teaches it. A man doesn't need religion to teach him kindness."

"From whence comes your standard of morality, and what does it embody?"

"From my own inner consciousness, and it embodies kindness, gentleness, honor, and a host of such things."

"Why, that's just what the Bible teaches. But, Mr. Preston, if men held themselves responsible only to the bar of their individual consciences, the wheels of civilization would soon come to a standstill. Some one has written,

"'If crime is to be repressed, the moral regeneration of men must be accepted as possible, and the universal reign of mechanical necessity must be denied. Let what Christ has taught of man's nature and destiny be denied, let the fact of personal responsibility to God be rejected, and I affirm that when men universally believe this, social order will have no existence, and the human race will be plunged into a general pandemonium!'"

"Education, Miss Stella, is what men need—the capacity and the will to think for themselves. They'd readily see that there's no personal advantage to be gained by lawlessness and vice."

"Mr. Preston, you cannot educate vile propensities out of a man. God's grace can eliminate them; nothing else can. The standard to which you are trying to conform your life is a good one, and you get it out of the Bible. It originated in the Divine mind, was given first to Moses, and through him to the world. If the moral law is not of divine origin, Mr. Preston, isn't it strange that in all these thousands of years no one has been found who could improve it in the slightest degree? And it fits everywhere—national, state, or individual cases. You do not think, do you, that human understanding ever produced such a system of ethics?"

He answered, pleasantly,

"It is a remarkable code, Miss Stella." He broke from its stem a branch of golden rod, which grew near his path, and holding it toward her, said, "Tell me the botanical names of its parts."

"I never studied botany," she replied, as she took the brilliant flower from his hand and fastened it in her belt. "Mr. Preston, you are treating yourself with great injustice."

"How so?"

"Working, yet deliberately refusing your reward."

"You must be more explicit," was the smiling reply.

"What do you expect in return for your correct life, and your deeds of self-denial?"

"The approval of my conscience. That means happiness, and that is what we are all seeking."

"'To the sunny soul that is full of hope,
And whose beautiful trust ne'er faileth;
The grass is green and the flowers are bright
Though the wintry storm prevaileth.'"

"That is only poetry, Miss Stella. The 'sunny soul' can no more live on it's 'beautiful trust' than I can. Life means work, and with it we naturally seek pleasure."

"Yes, we work, and justice demands compensation. Merely an intellectual gratification because we have done something for the common cause of humanity, doesn't satisfy the craving of our nature. There's a longing born in our souls that nothing short of immortality can satisfy. Oh, Mr. Preston, if you could but realize how you are defrauding yourself. Have faith in God, and He says, 'All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's!'"

It was an earnest face that met Morgan's smiling gaze, as he said, after a brief pause,

"Miss Stella, I think I deserve sympathy from some source. Between you and Auntie I have had nothing but lecture this whole afternoon."

"Just one question more, Mr. Preston, please. You mentioned Auntie. What is it that sustains her, and causes her to meet death without a shudder? She shows no fear, no trepidation."

"As you know, Miss Stella, the Africans are a very emotional race. You had been singing a sweet song to her this afternoon, full of pathos and feeling, consequently her emotions were aroused, and her imaginations supplied what calm reasoning would fail to give."

"And is that the only effect her words had upon

you? Oh, that we may all have our emotions aroused like hers when time, with us, shall be such a small consideration. As she said to you a while ago, 'Why *can't* you believe?'"

"Oh, I'm constitutionally perverse, I suppose, Miss Stella. Please don't let us talk about it any more. Let us talk of something on which we can agree. I have a piece of news for you. Can you guess what it is?"

"No, sir."

"Something that will give you pleasure. You will have company this evening."

She waited a moment, and then said,

"You have been kind enough to tell me this much, will you tell me whom to expect?"

"Do you really not know?"

"I do not."

"Mr. Elton is coming up this evening, I saw him yesterday, and he told me so."

"Is he? I will be glad to see him."

Mr. Preston was a little perplexed. She did look pleased, to be sure, but he had expected a greater transformation, and instantly concluded that she had been apprised of his coming, and intimated as much, not meaning to question.

"No," she replied. "I had a letter from him this week, but he did not say when he was coming."

"I expect he intended to give you a surprise, and I have thoughtlessly spoiled his plan."

"I expect so. That is just like Harry."

When they approached the house, she invited him to enter, but he declined, and was about to pass on, when Mrs. McMurray came to the door.

"Laws bless me, Morgan," she said, "won't you come in?"

"Not this evening, thank you. Mother will expect me home."

"Why, you hain't been here this long time. The boys were talkin' about it no longer ago than yesterday."

"I have but little time at home," he replied, "and mother is jealous, but I'll come, thank you."

He was very much surprised to find his cousin, Nina, entertaining Mr. Elton when he reached home; but surprise gave place to amazement when that gentleman did not rise to go until nine o'clock. But Stella was not surprised.

CHAPTER XII.

"God's in his heaven,
All's right with the world.

THREE months have flown by since the simple events transpired which are related in the foregoing chapter. A brief measure of time, richly laden with gladness for some, and hope and bright expectations; to others, pregnant with sorrow and disappointment and gloom. It is midwinter. The snow lay piled in great white banks against the fences, and in a shoreless sea of brightness over field and orchard and lawn surrounding the McMurray homestead. Stella—bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked Stella—sat at the familiar dining-room window with some light needlework near her, but her hands were idly clasped in her lap, while her appreciative eyes drank in the beauties of the scene without. The declining sun shone brightly on hedge and twig and tree, all alike freighted with the feathery white mass, until every flake on the encrusted branches glistened and gleamed like gems in a royal coronet.

Thus she sat thinking and listening, dreamily absorbed, to the sound of the merry bells as they jingled by. Ah! joyous youth and maiden, your hearts are light and happy to-day as you glide over the glistening snow, telling oft-told, sweet tales, and reading your answers in blushing, rosy faces, but there is sadness somewhere. In somebody's breast there are heart-throbs of woe to-day, and misery and suffering; and all this brightness is mockery, and the shadow of death is over it all. Her father came in, and after talking jocosely to Stella for a few minutes, tossed a letter into her lap and went out. She knew the superscription and quickly broke the seal. She had read but a few lines when her face assumed an expression of amazement and sorrow. The letter was from Harry Elton and she read these words:

"How little I thought when I saw you one short week ago, that I should have such sad news to communicate now. We buried my father yesterday. I can scarcely realize the dreadful truth, as I see the words gliding from my pen. It was all so sudden that it seems to me we have done everything mechanically since that dreadful moment. Dear father! always so kind and lenient toward me, a wayward boy. I know you will be interested, so I will tell you all."

Then, after a brief and graphic account of his father's sudden death, he said:

"As for me, life has more of reality in it now than ever before. Duties and responsibilities for which I feel utterly unprepared are thrown upon me. I know that I have your sympathy, little sister, and I expect to need your kindly advice and counsel."

"Poor Harry," thought Stella, as she folded the letter and replaced it in its wrapper. "How sincerely

I pity him. How will he assume cares and responsibilities after the care-free life to which he has been accustomed?" Then, after a moment she mentally answered her own question, "But he will prove equal to the emergency. If he *is* full of life and buoyancy, he is also a man of sterling qualities. Poor Harry!" she spoke the last words aloud, just as her mother entered the room. Noticing the anxious look on her face she asked,

"Is anything the matter, daughter?"

"Yes, mother, Harry Elton's father is dead."

"Now, you don't tell me. That nice old man? When did he die?"

"Very suddenly, a few days ago."

"And look here, Stella," spoken with animation as though the idea had just flashed upon her, "didn't I tell you so? When old Aunt Polly died, poor thing, week afore last, her jints were as limber as could be, and I told ye then there'd be three deaths afore long. Now, mark my words, there'll be another one."

"Oh, I hope not."

"Very well, now, you'll see. I tell you that sign don't often fail. Your poor old grandmother always was mighty scared when there was a limber corpse in the neighborhood. Poor Mrs. Elton and Harry. I'm very sorry for them. This will set dreadful hard on them, no doubt."

"Yes, mother, I wish I could speak a word of comfort. Suppose you go and see them, mother."

"Me, child? Why I couldn't do that upon no account. All the boys trowsers want kneein' and seatin', and then there's a pile o' muslin to make up besides."

Evidently fearing that Stella would press the subject, the well-meaning lady arose and went out, and

busied herself preparing supper. But Stella sat still, communing with her own thoughts, while the shadows lengthened athwart the snow-covered lawn, the sunlight gradually faded into twilight, distant objects became indistinguishable, the twilight imperceptibly melted into starlight, and hundreds and thousands of bright twinkling orbs smiled in upon the sweet thoughtful face beside the casement. She thought of Harry Elton's darkened home, and its subdued voices and saddened faces. Then she saw her friend taking up the burden where other hands had dropped it, and "this fever that we call living," was now something stirring and earnest, and she smiled as she pictured to herself Harry adjusting himself to the plodding routine of business. Then, with woman's characteristic intuition she peered a little further into the future, and saw, to use a comprehensive and practical phrase, that Harry would need a wife. Then it became very apparent that this would hasten the consummation of his marriage with Nina Hudson. Indeed her thoughts ran riot to such an extent that she even pictured to herself Nina in wedding attire. Then her thoughts drifted back to the afternoon before old nurse died. Someone had visited her, and left immortelles and fruit. It was easy enough for Stella to surmise who the "someone" was. The least bit of a sigh fluttered up from the breast when she thought of him: why, she could not have told. She did not even name him in her thoughts; he was only "he;" and her thoughts just at this moment had they been spoken, would have been something like this:

"I have not seen him in a long time. What an enigma he is. Utterly sceptical, yet doing Christian work; temperate, benevolent, strictly moral, a model

son, and a favorite with everybody. Not another young man in all the neighborhood thought of going to see old nurse, much less to carry her dainties and flowers. And more commendable still, he takes no credit to himself for it, nor allows anyone to know he has done a kindness, if by any means he can prevent it. But that terrible infidelity," and the girl fairly shuddered. "Why *does* he have so many redeeming qualities? I could almost wish he had none! Yet, somehow, I cannot help liking him." Footsteps on the crusted snow startled her, and looking out she beheld the object of her thoughts just stepping on the porch. She did not have time to tone down the bright smile of welcome that shone on her face as she admitted him. "Why, Mr. Preston! I thought you would have been enjoying this fine sleighing this evening."

"No, Miss Stella, I prefer a delightful fire like this."

As she proceeded to light the lamp, she replied,

"Now, don't give me that old excuse about the cold weather. That has exploded long ago. You had a better reason than that."

"Well, perhaps I had," with a quiet smile breaking over his face. Soon after he came in they were invited to tea, and around the table the subject of Mr. Elton's death was discussed at length. After tea he and Stella were left to entertain each other. This did not seem a disagreeable arrangement to either of them, for on general topics their opinions were perfectly congenial. And Stella, an earnest searcher after knowledge, dexterously gathered from him many a bit of information in the course of an evening's conversation. On this particular evening they had hardly come to talking of themselves, when the sound of bells was heard at the gate, and a merry party of young folks

came in, and held what one of the number called "a regular jollification." Lively conversation, interspersed with music, became now the order of the evening. Stella's brothers came in and made themselves generally agreeable to the lassies of the company, while her mother passed among them a bountiful waiter of cake and apples. Apple seeds were laid on the stove two by two, and named for some lady and gentleman of the company; and whether they flew antagonistically toward each other, or coquettishly in the other direction, the result was marked by peals of laughter. Some were naming apple seeds by fours on the palm of the hand. Stella unconsciously sighed as she noticed someone thus occupied. Mr. Preston, always observant, noticed what to him seemed an ill-timed expression of sadness, and inquired into it.

"That little by-play," she replied, "reminded me of one of Harry Elton's mischievous tricks when he was here last summer. Then I thought of his present trouble, and I suppose that caused an involuntary sigh."

Then she told how Harry had teased her about Mr. Todhunter, and many amusing things he did and said. He laughed at the pleasant recital, then said in an undertone,

"I suppose you were very lonely after Mr. Elton went away."

"Yes, sir; we all missed him very much."

"But *you*, particularly, I presume."

She did not notice the bantering tone in which this sentence was spoken, and answered in all candor,

"I suppose I did miss him more than anyone else in the family, from the fact that we were thrown together a great deal. But we all felt that the house was lonelier after he left it."

"I believe him to be a very estimable young man indeed; but will you excuse me, Miss Stella, if I tell you that at one time I thought him unpardonably changeable."

"I had given you credit for being a better physiognomist than that, but I assure you fickleness is entirely foreign to his character. How came you to think so?"

"A few months ago I would not have answered that question, Miss Stella, nor have given you cause to ask it—I think I am not treading on forbidden ground—but I regarded you and Mr. Elton then as lovers, and was puzzled beyond measure when, later on, he began to pay attention to Nina. I naturally supposed he was playing you false, and expected to see you pine away and become a mere shadow; but there seems no danger of such a catastrophe."

She laughed a very light-hearted laugh for a grief-stricken girl, and answered,

"You were greatly mistaken, indeed, sir. Mr. Elton never played the *role* of lover towards me; his conduct has been uniformly that of a brother, and we never for a moment regarded each other in any other light."

Morgan Preston's face beamed with pleasure, and he was about to reply when one of the young ladies in the company said,

"Stella, I think Mr. Preston is appropriating your company entirely too much. Do you know it's ten o'clock and we must go home? Another piece before we go, please."

She arose at once and complied, and as soon as she had finished an instrumental piece glided into the sweet, sacred song:

"While the years are rolling by."

She sang it through softly, and with perfect expression. Then kind good-nights were said, and the company dispersed.

CHAPTER XIII.

"GREAT day!" was Mrs. McMurray's not very comprehensive expression, when one morning about a month subsequent to his father's death, Harry Elton strode in upon them, all unexpectedly, as she and Stella sat together in the sitting-room, she with her "everlasting knitting," as Harry termed it, and Stella with her sewing. He relished hugely the amazement pictured on their faces, and two minutes after he had shaken hands with them, and hung his hat and coat on the rack, he was perfectly at home. Mrs. McMurray dropped a stitch in her agitation just at the very climax of "turning a heel," and she threatened to dislodge him if he ever should come in again so unceremoniously.

They threw conventionalities to the winds, and were soon engrossed in animated conversation. Family and financial affairs since his father's death were discussed, and he told them of his later experience in the counting-room, and he wished to conduct the business that had so unexpectedly fallen into his hands. With the freedom of an intimate friend, Stella said,

"Harry, I believe you to be honest and sincere; and just in the proportion as we love and honor God, will we try to serve Him. You are now at the head of an important house, can control it as you will, and you have young men in your employ over whom you exert an influence. Make religion a desirable thing before them."

"How, Stella?"

"By keeping your heart always toward God, and the light of his love will illuminate your life. They will see that religion is not something to make one gloomy and taciturn; but cheerful and happy-hearted, benevolent and patient, standing always upon your integrity, and pursuing a straight, even course."

"I will try, Stella."

"And I am sure you will be steadfast and true, Harry, and your example will be noticed and imitated."

In the afternoon when they were alone together, he introduced a new topic of conversation by saying, impulsively:

"Stella, do you know that I am contemplating one of the most important steps in life?"

"How could I be expected to know it when you never told me?" she answered, looking up at him, archly.

"Your perceptive powers are so keen, I thought perhaps you had guessed it."

"I seldom trouble myself to guess out other people's affairs; what they wish me to *know* they generally tell me."

"So they do. Well, I am seriously contemplating matrimony. Would you have believed it?"

"I see nothing remarkable in it."

"Now, Stel, after making up one's mind to it, what is the next step in order?"

"Asking the young lady, I should think."

"Well," he cleared his throat very vehemently, "will you marry me?"

She looked into his face just for an instant, then burst into a merry laugh.

"No," she said.

"Why?"

"Two of the very best reasons in the world—I don't want you and you don't want me."

"Well, Miss Wisdom, whom do we respectively desire?"

"You, Nina Hudson; I, no one."

Her random shot took effect, for he colored to his temples. He recovered himself in a moment, though, and with the utmost *sang-froid* continued tho subject.

"Let us suppose such to be the case. What, now, is your opinion of the young lady whose name you have mentioned? Unvarnished, now."

"I will answer you honestly, and in a very few words. First of all, I believe she is a Christian woman. Then she is sensible and accomplished. In short, Harry, out of all my acquaintances I would have chosen her for you had you asked me to make a selection. Does that satisfy you?"

"Yes, perfectly," and, as if in corroboration of his words he glided into another subject. "I saw one of your old friends a few days ago."

"Mine? To whom do you refer?"

"Your jilted adorer. Have you forgotten your conquest of last summer?"

"Do you mean Mr. Todhunter?"

"The very same."

"You saw him, you say. Well, what of him?"

"Nothing, only he's married."

"Was there really some one who could marry *him?*"

"It seems so."

"I am surprised, for I always thought him 'so empty, that if there be in nature found the least vacuity, 'twill be in him.' But I am glad he has found his mate."

"I expect he is, too. I met him on the street, congratulated him, and so on. He was unusually patronizing; pressed me to call and become acquainted with Mrs. T."

"Did you call?"

"Certainly. I had some curiosity on that point."

"Well?"

"That one little word 'well' comprises your question, but it means volumes. What did she look like, what is her size, weight, color of hair and eyes, what did she wear and how did she wear it? How was her hair 'arranged,' what did she say, and ten thousand other things. Well, let me begin: She's rather a handsome woman, large and stout; she'll tip the beam at a hundred and seventy-five pounds, avoirdupois, every ounce of it. Looks younger than Tod by several years, but I'll wager she can manage him. Has light hair and gray eyes. She wore a dark dress, blue or green or something, very elaborately trimmed, and her whole manner bespeaks one who thinks she has made a good settlement in life.

"Very interesting, especially when you describe the color of her dress; but you have left two questions unanswered."

"What are they?"

"How was her hair arranged, and what did she say?"

"Stella, a Philadelphia lawyer couldn't tell you how her hair was fixed. A woman might. It was frizzled and fussed and tangled and tumbled, with a bright bow pinned on the only place where it would stick. Do you get the idea?"

"Perfectly," she answered, laughing.

"I don't know whether I can give our conversation verbatim or not. I'll only attempt to give you a gen-

eral idea. I alluded to the bridal tour, and asked her how she enjoyed the ride up the Hudson. She smiled sweetly, and said 'Oh! it was perfectly lovely.' I then asked her if she had ever visited Niagara before. She replied in the negative, and I then inquired how the first glimpse of the magnificent waterfall affected her. She smiled more sweetly, if possible, than before, and said, 'Oh! I thought it was *so* sweet.' This subject being exhausted, I then ventured to inquire if she had visited a certain gallery of art in New York City. She answered, with a smile of ineffable sweetness, 'Yes, sir.' I was encouraged to pursue the subject further, and asked if she was well repaid. 'Oh, yes,' she said, 'we saw some real pretty pictures.' Something impelled me to ask: 'What subject, Mrs. Todhunter, attracted you most?' After a slight hesitation she answered: 'There was a picture of Grant's surrender to Harry Gilmor—I think it was—at Appomatox Court House, that I thought was fine.' I couldn't recall the incident, so I rose to go."

Stella laughed merrily.

"Harry, are you sure you are not exaggerating?"

"'Pon honor,' as Tod says."

"Well, how did Mr. Todhunter deport himself?"

"Oh, Tod looked with admiration and approval upon his faithful spouse, and wisely kept silence."

"After all, Harry, isn't she rather an amiable creature?"

"She has an amiable way of getting what she wants. When I rose to go, Tod took his overcoat off the rack and said, 'I will go as far as Nelson's with you. I promised to meet a party there this evening.' But Mrs. Tod, with one of those bewitching smiles, merely said, 'My dear St. George, I am going to the theatre to-night, and you would hardly wish *me* to go

alone.' With surprising promptness the obedient husband hung up his coat, and said: 'Ah, yes. Beg pardon, Mrs. Todhunter; can go to Nelson's any time.' I then bade the happy couple 'Good evening.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

"The parting is hard, my treasure,
It will darken my life, I know,
But the dream I have dreamed was a folly—
It is better to let you go.
And I brush from my throbbing temples
The heavy, clinging hair,
And smother my anguish, trying
To believe I do not care."

"Grief walks the earth,
And sits down at the foot of each by turns."
PROMETHEUS BOUND.

WHEN evening came, and Mr. Elton excused himself for a little while to his young hostess, and walked over to Mr. Preston's, Stella, more than half suspecting the nature of his errand, determined to sit up and await his return, saying to herself, "I want to be the first to congratulate him upon the happiest event of his life."

So she gathered up her embroidery, drew near the fire, and sat down to work, and think, and wait. The mother, somehow, seemed slow to succumb to drowsiness to-night, but at last she, too, yielded to the wily god, retired, and Stella sat there alone. Only a little while after this—sooner than she had expected—she heard her friend's steps on the porch. She stirred up the fire, then listened and looked at her companion, for he had already entered. She gave an involuntary

start, and, stepping up to him, laid her hand on his arm, and said, in a frightened voice:

"Harry, what is the matter?"

His face was pale and sorrowful, and he sat down without answering.

"Harry, tell me, are you ill? I will call mother."

He put out his hand to detain her, and without raising his eyes to her face, said,

"No—no, I am not ill. There is nothing the matter, Stella, only I have had the bitterest, bitterest disappointment that ever comes in a man's life-time."

His voice was almost a groan. Stella, almost stupefied with astonishment, said,

"Why, you don't mean that Nina has——" and hesitated. He finished the sentence,

"Refused me? Yes, coldly and decidedly."

"For what reason, Harry?"

"She does not love me. That is the only reason intimated. Oh, Stella, I expected such a different answer."

"You had a right to expect a different answer," she replied, impetuously. "She does love you, Harry. She's testing you too severely; and its unwomanly."

"No, indeed, Stella, she is in earnest."

"Then she is not the woman I thought."

"Don't say that, Stella. Of course she cannot do otherwise. There's no one to suffer but me, and I can bear it as many others have done."

"But it isn't right, Harry, and I say she *is* to blame."

"It is your sympathy for me that makes you say that, Stella, and I do not undervalue it," he answered. But you will not think so when your cooler judgment asserts itself. I do not blame her in the least,

and I believe she acted from pure motives, even as I believe her to be a true Christian woman. As such I respect her, and always shall."

Stella had no reply for this. He strode across the floor several times, then dropped into the chair that she had vacated at his entrance. It is hard to realize that this crushed and disappointed and sorrowing man is the bright, buoyant, hopeful one that we saw a few hours ago. She approached him, and, laying her hand tenderly on his bowed head, said,

"Forgive me, Harry. I meant to comfort, not to wound you; but my indignation gained the mastery. When I ought to teach you courage, you are teaching it to me. I do sympathize with you, Harry, and pray that you may be able to forget her."

"That is impossible. If I were a boy, with fickle, changeable affections, I might."

"Ah, Harry, you must not think of sorrowing all your life. Women are not worthy of all the regret they cause. I'd bend every energy to overcome it, and I'd be master of the situation, yet."

She spoke very bravely, this unsophisticated little girl. In a voice that was piteously calm, he replied,

"Yes, Stella, I'll overcome it, and this is how I'll do it. Believing that Miss Hudson has acted according to the dictates of her heart and conscience, I submit to her decision; and will ask God, who loves me, and pities me, to give me something to do for Him, that will help me to bear my burden with patience. To say that I'm disappointed seems like saying nothing in the world about it. All my future is changed. I couldn't tell you all the bright dreams I have had of a happy home, with her for its queen. But this ends it all. Ah, well, most every one carries a hidden sorrow, and this must be mine."

"Do not speak so despondently, Harry. Behind the clouds the sun is still shining. Bear up bravely, that she and the world may not know of your grief."

"I'll remember your counsel, Stella. You know we are never sad, nor hopeless, nor desponding when actively employed in some live, invigorating, God-given work. I'll not allow my feelings to run riot again, little sister, as I've done to-night. I'll be braver to-morrow. Good-night," and he took a lamp and went to his room.

Silenced but not convinced, she sat down by the window, and, looking out at the bright patches of moonlight without, said to herself,

"If I could think as Harry does now, I could have spoken differently to him. 'Take a woman to know a woman,' is a true old adage. Not love him, indeed. I don't believe a word of it, not a word. For some mysterious reason she is deceiving him. I don't comprehend it, for I thought she was a Christian girl. I'll go and see her to-morrow. Perhaps there's something that I can set right. Poor fellow, he is almost heart-broken. Oh! I could shake her good."

With this charitable desire still uppermost in her mind, she also retired. Mr. Elton appeared at breakfast next morning so perfectly at ease that no one judged of the storm that had so recently swept over his life. Only Stella knew his secret, and she would not divulge it. Not the slightest allusion to the events of the previous evening was made by either of them, and after the usual kind adieu, Mr. Elton went back to the city by the early train. A few hours after, and Stella McMurray stood at Mrs. Preston's friendly door.

"Come in, dear," said motherly Mrs. Preston, "I'm glad to see you."

"Thank you. But you are not alone, are you, Mrs. Preston?"

"Nina is upstairs, I know you want to see her, so just walk right up to her room. I may as well tell you, she is getting ready to go home. I don't know what has come over her, I am sure," and the good lady looked perplexed.

"Going away, is she?" Stella was astonished. And the expression of astonishment had not left her face when she entered Nina's room upstairs. A bright fire burned on the hearth, and Nina's trunks stood open in the middle of the floor, while all the mysterious paraphernalia of a feminine wardrobe lay scattered about in hopeless confusion. "Why, what does all this mean, Nina?" exclaimed Stella as she entered and closed the door.

Nina was standing at the window in a listless attitude, but started at the sound of her friend's voice, and advanced to meet her.

"Oh, nothing," she answered, with a forced smile, "only I am going home this evening."

"This evening? Is there anything the matter at home?"

"No, but I have been here quite a long while."

"But you intended to stay until May," persisted Stella.

"Yes, but aunt is lonely and *I must go home.*"

Stella looked at her in silence for a moment and pitied her. She was pale and haggard. There were great, dark rings around her eyes, and she looked anything but happy. She was standing on the rug before the fire; Stella knelt down by her, and placing her arms about her waist, after a girlish fashion, and looking up into her face, said,

"Nina, don't equivocate any longer. You'll only

feel the worse by it. I *know* why you are going away, and I know you are unhappy. Tell me all all about it now, dear, won't you? There is a wrong somewhere that may be righted."

Nina drew away from her friend's encircling arms and said, haughtily,

"No, there is not. I've been here since August, and now I'm going home. That's all there is to know."

Stella arose and stood smiling before her.

"Now, Nina, dear, don't try to play off any of your stately airs on me. It's worse than useless, for I'll tell you in the outset, I will not be intimidated nor driven from my purpose by them. I am determined to make you confess for your own sake, and his and mine."

"You mystify me."

"Do I?" Stella McMurray's manner changed, and she, too, for the moment, was haughty. "Nina Hudson, do you think that I came here to pry into your most sacred affairs, and urge you to give me your confidence to gratify an idle curiosity or furnish food for gossip?"

"No."

Her manner had softened a little. Stella approached her again, and said in a gentle, winning voice,

"Nina, I love you; and Harry Elton is my warm, earnest, personal friend, and did I not think that I can do you both a kindness, I would not be here this morning asking your confidence. I know the worst of it any way. Now, will you not tell me why you wounded him so?"

"What do you know?"

"I know that last evening you refused Harry Elton's offer of marriage, and——"

Nina interrupted her with an impatient gesture.

"How do you know this? I suppose he told you. A pretty example of manliness. Did he send you here to plead his cause?" scornfully.

"Nina, Mr. Elton is as proud as you are. He has not the slightest shadow of an idea that I have taken this bold step. Had he known that I contemplated it, he would have forbidden it, positively. And he defends you, Nina, although you have almost broken his heart. He wouldn't hear me utter a word of blame. You ask if he told me? Yes, and he was not compromising his manliness in the least by doing so. His warm-hearted, impetuous nature makes friends where your cold, reserved disposition would not, and when one proves to be a friend, he is not hidden and distrustful. No disgrace attaches to *his* part of the transaction, that he should refrain from telling me. But I would have known it any way, for I can read him like an open book."

"You are so infatuated with him, it is a wonder you did not marry him yourself," Nina said rather spitefully.

"He never wanted me."

"Well, he acted very much like it."

"You are entirely mistaken. We understood each other perfectly well from the beginning of our acquaintance. We are the the truest and best of friends. And I tell you in all candor, Nina, that had Harry Elton and I loved each other as husband and wife ought to love, I would consider myself the luckiest woman in the world to become his wife. Nina Hudson, I am firmly convinced that you are throwing away your best chances of happiness."

"Perhaps so."

"Do you intend to tell me *why* you refused him?"

"As he told you the fact he ought to have told you the reason," icily.

"He did tell me the reason you assigned to him. You gave him to believe that you do not love him, and of course, that, to him, is a sufficient reason, and would to me, if it were true; but I don't believe a word of it."

"Stella, you have no right to say that—no right to say that I don't tell the truth."

"Nina, I did not say that you absolutely said so, but in some way you made Mr. Elton believe it. Now I will walk deliberately home without asking you another question if you will tell me in plain English that you do not love Harry Elton."

She looked into her friend's face, sought to prevaricate a little further, but the words died on her lips, and the upshot of the matter was, her head sank on Stella's shoulder, and she began to sob aloud. That was what Stella had been aiming for, and she smiled complacently above the bowed head. The first words that Nina uttered were,

"Oh, why was I born to such misery?"

"You were not born to it, Nina. Like nine-tenths of the people, you are bringing it on yourself."

"Don't talk to me that way, Stella," she was humble enough now. "Can't you say something comforting?"

"Yes, I can tell you how to undo all the mischief you've done. Give Harry Elton to know that he may come back. That you did not——"

She sprang up, frightened.

"No, never—never. Stella, if you ever let Mr. Elton know that I gave way thus, I'll never forgive you. Mind, I didn't say that—I love him. I know just what I'm doing. It is best as it is."

"Then if you are so certain you are right, answer me the one question that I came to ask. Why did you refuse him?"

After a little hesitation,

"I'll tell you, Stella. I can't trust him."

"Why can't you trust him? Did you ever hear anything derogatory to his character?"

"No, but I have discovered for myself that he is vacilating and trifling. You know I told you that months ago."

"I know you did, but as you became better acquainted with him, I thought you had given that chimerical idea to the winds long ago. I have known him a little longer than you have, and a great deal more intimately, and I *know* him to be the exact opposite."

Nina's face was all flushed and tear-stained, when she said,

"Stella, you need not seek to dissuade me from my purpose. I cannot marry him. I cannot trust him. Were I to promise, I would doubt his intention of fulfilling his promise."

In a sudden burst of honest indignation Stella said,

"Nina, your language is shocking to me, and unjust in the extreme. I will not hear any more. I would stake my life on Harry Elton's honor and truth, if necessary."

"But, Stella, I tell you, you are mistaken. It was just such a man as he who trifled with Aunt Lovejoy."

Here was the solution then of the whole mystery. It flashed upon Stella in an instant. The precepts of babyhood brought up against the dictates of matured reason. Stella did not answer for several moments, then she said,

"Nina, you have no right to compare Mr. Elton

with the villian who abused your aunt's confidence. You never saw the other party, and all you know is hearsay. As I have told you over and over again, I *know* Harry Elton to be an upright and honorable man. I would trust him under all circumstances, anywhere, as soon as I would trust myself; sooner than I would trust you."

Nina laid her head on the window-sill, and burst into tears.

"Why?" she asked meekly.

"Because your judgment is singularly warped. You have nothing in the world to substantiate your false idea, yet you cling to it as tenaciously as if it were backed by proofs."

"Stella," tearfully, "there is all the similarity in the world between the two."

"One was a villian, the other a Christian. Is there any similarity between those two extremes?"

"Mr. Elton has been a professing Christian only for a short while. Time will tell how steadfast he will be. But both were wealthy, both handsome, both gay."

"Oh, because your aunt was jilted by a handsome, wealthy villian, you have no right to think that all handsome, wealthy men are like-principled. Because he wears a bright, happy face, and has a pleasant word for everybody, you think forsooth he trifles. I tell you, you are jeopardizing your happiness."

"Well," raising her tear-stained face, "I cannot act otherwise. I believe I am right. He will soon forget me."

"I wish he might forget you, but I do not believe he ever will. You have ruined his whole life, Nina, and all for foolish prejudice."

"Stella, this is cruel, indeed it is."

"Well, it's true, any way. I pity him more than

you, Nina; for you, who have done wrong, can undo it, and will not."

"You will find that you are mistaken. He will forget me in a little while; and in the years to come, some plain, honest man may give me his heart."

"Plain, honest fiddlestick. I have no patience with such talk. I only pity Harry from the depths of my heart. I am going home now. Do you positively forbid me to hint to him that you might see him again? This is my last appeal, and I entreat you, for your sake and his, think before you act."

"I do most positively forbid it, Stella. I am doing the only thing that is left me to do."

"It were wasting breath to tell you that I hope you will not regret this rash decision, for I know you will. Forgive me if I have spoken too plainly or harshly. Good-bye."

Stooping, she kissed the weeping girl, then hurried down stairs and home. And Nina Hudson packed her trunks, her uncle took her to the station, and that evening found her at home in H——. She dutifully told her aunt the circumstances that had shortened her visit, and Miss Lovejoy assured her that she acted judiciously and well.

CHAPTER XV.

"What is philosophy if it impart
Irreverence for the Diety, or teach
A mortal man to set his judgment up
Against his Maker's will."

KIRKE WHITE.

NINA HUDSON'S sudden disappearance from the neighborhood created a theme for conjecture and con-

versation for a few days, but it was a very limited number who knew or guessed the real cause. And Morgan Preston was astounded, too, when he came home on the Saturday following, and found upon inquiring that she had "arisen and departed." His mother, like others, could only surmise—thought Mr. Elton implicated in some way, for Nina had no thought of going until after he came and went. This much she told him.

"Stella McMurray came in on the morning before she left. They talked quite a while up-stairs, but I know nothing of the nature of the interview."

"Ah! did she? Then perhaps she can throw some light on the subject. I will call and see her this evening."

So, armed with his cousin Nina's sudden departure for an excuse, we find Mr. Preston in the parlor of McMurray's, quietly awaiting Miss Stella's appearance. She came in presently, looking sprightly and winning as usual. Showing that the subject was still uppermost in her mind, soon after her entrance she remarked,

"I suppose you were surprised when you came home and found that Nina had fled?"

"I was, indeed. I am now on the search of evidence that will justify her in leaving so unceremoniously. So far, the subject seems enshrouded in mystery."

"Did you think I could give you such evidence?"

"I thought it quite possible. Mother said you had a lengthy conversation with her just before she left."

"Yes; I did. But if you seek for evidence to justify her, as you say, you will be disappointed in mine."

"You alarm me. Has my dignified cousin been guilty of a misdemeanor!"

Laughing, Stella replied,

"I am afraid she has."

"Well, let us proceed with the case. I summon you to the witness stand. Now, Miss Stella," laughingly, "I want you to tell me all you know about Cousin Nina's flight."

"I do not acknowledge the authority of this court."

"Am I so unskilled in jurisprudence as this?" he retorted. "Well, you will at least tell me, Miss Stella of what you think Nina guilty."

"To talk seriously, Mr. Preston, I think her guilty of something that has the appearance of flirting."

"Impossible. Nina would never stoop to that."

"No, I do not believe she would, promiscuously. But Mr. Preston, she has treated Mr. Elton very unfairly."

"As I know nothing whatever in regard to the occurrence of which you are cognizant, I cannot express an opinion. I do not even know what relation they hold to each other."

"I will tell you, but I want this distinctly understood that did I not think you would lay the blame of this strange transaction where it does not belong, if kept in ignorance of the facts, I would not repeat what concerns any of the immediate parties."

"If you promised secrecy, Miss Stella, I certainly would not ask you to break your word."

"Oh, no, sir. I promised nothing of the kind."

Then she told him the simple facts in the case without entering much into details.

"And she refused him?" he said in astonishment. "Well, I cannot but think that Nina believed she was doing exactly right, but Miss Stella, if she was not

fond of him then appearances never deceived me more in my life."

"Mr. Preston, do you think Harry Elton a man who would make a promise of marriage without an unchangeable purpose of fulfilling it?"

"No, I do not. But in Nina's case we must remember she was educated to that opinion of men in general; and of Mr. Elton's type in particular."

"I cannot understand how a girl of her intelligence could be educated to such an absurdity. And even if we admit that, still she is not clear of blame in this matter. If she thought him a man unfit to be trusted, why did she encourage his attentions?"

"I can only conjecture. But I still think she cared for him more than she would like for us to know, although she has acted so strangely. Probably she thought it never would come te a proposal."

"Mr. Preston, he would scorn to do as she has done. He gave her the best love of his life, and she coolly trampled on it. Why did she not give him to know her unfounded opinion of him long ago? A very slight insinuation would have been sufficient for a man of his susceptibilities. Indeed, I quite lose patience with her when I think about it. Her Christianity ought to have taught her better."

He did not reply, but smiled in a quaint, meaning way. They were sitting on the sofa and his face was turned toward her. She looked at him searchingly for a moment; he bore her scrutiny quietly, kindly and still smilingly. Then she said,

"I see by your face that you doubt the power of Christianity to keep one always in the right path."

"Is that all you read, Stella?" he asked in a low, gentle voice.

Ah? my usually firm, demure, self-possessed Miss

McMurray, what makes the rich, warm blood suffuse your face to the very temples, and even the little pink finger-tips tremble as they fly around the soft, white zephyr you are weaving? That was a very commonplace sentence, indeed, but your remarkably well-regulated heart throbbed with an intense and new pleasure when you heard it. Why? Because this is the very first time since you were children that he has called you by your christian name; and then there was something—an indefinable something—in the tender voice that has strangely revealed to you the fact that he is very dear to you. Yes, dearer than anyone else on earth. Your confusion is but for an instant, and you think he does not define your thoughts; but he does; and a smile of glad content hovers about the features whereon rested a moment ago one of eager inquiry. For his question meant literally this, "Do you not read that I love you, Stella?" No, your confusion is solely the result of the revelation which your own heart has just made to you. And fearful lest he should comprehend, you answer quickly, "I spoke hastily, Mr. Preston. A person may be a sincere christian, yet err in judgment. What I meant was this: Had Nina asked herself seriously the question, 'Am I doing right in permitting his attention?' her conscience would have guided her better than this."

"A well-disciplined conscience seldom leads astray."

"What is conscience, Mr. Preston?"

"An innate principle that distinguishes between right and wrong."

"How do we educate conscience?"

"By encouraging right and condemning wrong."

"If there is no living, reigning, supreme God, unto whom we are personally responsible, why is one thing

right and another wrong? Against whom do we sin when we choose to do evil?"

"Against ourselves and our fellow-creatures."

"To the unregenerate heart revenge is sweet. If we wrong our neighbor he may retaliate in like manner, and thus get even. And if we believe there is no just judge to right our wrongs hereafter, this we will certainly do. Into what social condition would such a state of feeling, if general, soon plunge us?"

"But we cannot take revenge upon ourselves, Miss Stella, and wrong-doing recoils upon the perpetrator. When men are educated to see that vice brings its own punishment, both to our moral and physical natures, they will be slow to commit evil."

"Mr. Preston, because in your moral nature, kindness and forbearance predominate, you forget that with the masses it is different. Bitterness, wrath, envy, murders, jealousies, evil-speaking, with a host of kindred feelings, are rooted in the human heart. Will education hold these things in check?"

"To a great extent, yes. Mental development, if it teach a man anything, will teach him self-respect; and he will suffer much before he will outrage that."

"Still your words imply a limit. There may come an occasion when all these ugly, hideous little spirits will overleap their bounds, then misery follows for somebody. And this may happen to the man with the best mental equipment possible, if destitute of God's regenerating grace. But take a man, no matter how ignorant in other respects, who loves God, and whose heart is permeated with Bible religion, and when the temptation to evil comes, his religious nature will answer with an unalterable 'No,' because

those ugly spirits have given place to meekness, gentleness and love."

"Miss Stella, I have a better opinion of the world than you seem to have. I believe there's more gentleness and goodness in mankind, naturally, than you give him credit for. The great difficulty is that many cannot be brought under the refining influences of education."

"I am so glad that religion can teach every one of them, Mr. Preston; and for a refining element nothing that has ever been tried can compare with it. It brings out the very best that's in a man. But there's one peculiarity about your belief that I'd like to call your attention to. May I?"

"Certainly."

"Your model man is the one who conforms his life most nearly to the Bible standard. Why is it that you admire its doctrines, yet deny its authorship?"

"Because a correct moral life is the very best for a man in every way; and such a life, I must admit, the Bible teaches."

"Is not more than human intellect required for the perfecting of such rules as have never been surpassed for the general promotion of the good and happiness of the human race?"

Very pleasantly he answered,

"Now, Miss Stella, you are asking puzzling questions."

"Oh! my friend, you are starving your life. Turn where there is bread. Admit that Jesus Christ, the central figure in Bible history, came into the world to compass its redemption, open your heart to His love, and you will find therein treasures of which you never dreamed. Without Him you are leading a burdened, fruitless, aimless life. I am incapable of arguing with

you, for I know almost nothing about scientific principles with which you are conversant; but I *do* know there is truth in the revelation of Scripture, and I deeply deplore the mental darkness under which you are living."

"I cannot be in darkness, Miss Stella, when my opinions are based on self-evident truth."

"But how are you narrowed down by this self-evident truth! How are all the longings of human nature that are just as natural to us as to breathe, dwarfed and deadened by tenets so cruel and unsatisfactory!"

"I admit that your religion is more beautiful and satisfactory to those who can believe it."

"Why not believe it when it is a thousand times more natural than your own? Every day you live you torture into silence that earnest longing for immortality that glows in the breast of every mortal."

"But if I cannot prove that I am immortal, I do not wish to believe it, and be deceived at last.'"

"Why, you have nothing to lose in believing it, Mr. Preston. And may not the very fact of our having this great unconquerable horror of death and dissolution so strong within us, prove that we are immortal. God would not have implanted in our nature so strong a yearning for the unattainable."

"But you cannot prove this. It is only a theory based on the existence of certain natural feelings."

"What can you prove? Tell me why you live, moment by moment and year by year."

"By breathing; one of the simplest laws in nature. If you have forgotten it, I can give you Paley's explanation of the process, word for word," he answered pleasantly, thus seeking to draw her from the subject.

"I have not forgotten," she answered, "but

your philosophy never taught you *why* that process prolongs life. Why do all the little organs that constitute the eye when placed in their proper order produce sight?"

"That the eye *is* the organ of sight is a self-evident truth. We can analyze its parts and see the cause that produces the effect."

"But you cannot explain it. You know that the fact exists, but you know absolutely nothing about the why and wherefore. And, Mr. Preston, there are so few things that can be proven. Even scientists correct each other. Some years ago geologists told us that the world is still in its infancy, although inconceivable millions of ages had been necessary to bring it to its present state of completion. Now I read that 'astronomy has discovered this absolutely certain fact, that this whole planetary system of ours shows within itself signs of decay, must be coming to an end, must one day come to an end; that the heat of the sun which animates the world is gradually decaying; that our planet is gradually cooling, shrinking down from the globe of liquid matter it once was, until, as times and ages go on, it shows it is to become dead and cold and lifeless, like the moon that lights the earth.' So geology and astronomy differ, and I find nothing so positively demonstrated as that God lives and reigns. Look out of the window, Mr. Preston, at the clear sky so thickly sown with stars. A poet sat at his window one night and wrote this:

"'Thou proud man, look upon yon starry vault,
Survey the cloudless gems which richly stud
The night's imperial chariot. Telescopes
Will show thee myriads more, innumerous
Than the sea-sand, each of those little lamps
Is the great source of light, the central sun

Round which some other mighty sisterhood
Of planets travel, every planet stocked
With living beings, impotent as thee.
Now, proud man, now where is thy greatness fled,
What are thou in the scale of universe?
Less, less than nothing.'

What of that, Mr. Preston?"

"An eloquent speculation, Miss Stella. Poets are always visionary and speculative, you know."

"No one is visionary when paying his homage to the Great Creator. God and immortality are certainties. It is you who speculate," still looking out of the window she repeated reverently, "'When I survey the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the sun and the moon which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him?' How can you look upon the firmanent to-night and not acknowledge his handiwork?" She looked earnestly into his face and adis, "Oh, Mr. Preston, I tremble for you. I beg of you cease groping your way through life, clinging blindly to a theory that brings you only death and corruption and annihilation, while there are sunlight and life and heaven within your reach. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Believe that he created and sustained you and redeemed you."

"I wish I could believe it," slowly.

"Throw to the winds your ruinous creed. Accept the Bible as the Word of God. Accept the glorious doctrine of the Atonement. Christ suffered and died for us, washed us in his own blood, by his stripes we are healed and justified by faith in his redemption. Do you not see and believe?"

He was getting into a strait. He could not return argument for persuasion; he could not say again, "I do not believe in the doctrine of the Atonement, nor

in the Divinity of Christ, because I cannot comprehend them," while she was so earnest and sincere, and deeply interested for his safety. So he parried the question by saying,

"I meet with professing Christians, Miss Stella, who say plainly by their lives that they practise a delusion."

"How?"

"By their inconsistencies. They are either deluded or hypocritical; which do you call it?"

"Neither. 'Criticism is the surgeon's knife on the dead body of Religion, which misses the soul.' And it is not fair to judge the class by those exceptional cases."

"When you come to sift the churches, Miss Stella, I do not know that you will find them to be the exceptional cases."

"You cannot be a competent judge of another's actions, Mr. Preston. Only God can look in every direction at once, and read our lives without a mistake. One may be prompted by a good motive to an action that would seem to you from the result, inconsistent with religion. You cannot read another's heart."

"We must judge men by their lives, Miss Stella. Some things are too palpable for us to mistake them. I do not wish to be uncharitable, and I make it a rule not to speak of another's faults unnecessarily, but to-night I claim an indulgence."

"The fact of their inconsistent lives does not strengthen your argument, Mr. Preston. They, like you and I, will be brought face to face with God, one day, and these things will confront them there. Such examples are deplorable, I knew, but I need not emulate them."

"How about those who, while making no profession

of religion, lead blameless, peaceable, honest lives? Will they not share in the reward that you believe awaits the good?"

"'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye can in nowise enter into the kingdom of heaven.' A little child is innocent, humble, tractible, trusting, simple-minded, capable of receiving impressions, of being moulded and fashioned according to God's will."

"Where do you find such, Miss Stella?"

"There are plenty of them. Good, honest-hearted Christians, who, *if necessary,* would walk to the stake to-day. Oh, Mr. Preston, do not allow such insignificant causes to keep you out of your inheritance. Come into the light and see what ample provision God has made for your perfection and happiness."

"Miss Stella, believe me, I am honest in this. I admire your beautiful faith, but I cannot comprehend it. We never can agree on this subject. Do not let us talk about it again."

"I cannot promise that. I would *compel* you to believe, if I could."

He laughed at her earnestness as he rose to go.

"I will try to divert your attention from this topic when I come again."

The moment the door closed upon him she went to her room, sat down before the dying embers on the hearth, thinking, thinking a long while.

CHAPTER XVI.

"A man without some sort of religion is at least a poor reprobate, the football of destiny, with no tie linking him to infinity, and the wondrous eternity that is begun within him; but a woman without it is even worse—a flame without heat, a rainbow without color, a flower without perfume."

IK MARVEL.

IT is summer-time again. Just such a bright, joyous, luxuriant summer as it was a year ago. But the sweet, entrancing music of nature awakens but a mournful echo in the heart of one of our characters, who was bonniest and blithest of all only one little year ago. To Harry Elton time has dragged heavily of late. Trouble sets hard with one of his peculiar temperament. As unexpectedly as the fierce tornado does its work of death and desolation had his best hopes been riven. And he had hoped so much. With his fervent, honest nature, it was impossible for him to wear already a smiling face. So those who knew him intimately, knew that his heart was very sad. Some attributed it to the loss of his parent; and that indeed to him was a heavy affliction; but few knew of this other blow that had fallen with such blinding weight upon him. Yet these months of trial were not lost to him. His conduct since he has taken his father's business, has been one straight, unvarying line of honor, promptness and integrity. Out of the score of young men in his employ, not one would have spoken but in his praise. His example was one of such unmistakable purity, that they could not do otherwise than love and respect him. They feared to disobey him, too; for the laws of his house were rigid in regard to dissipation or dishonorable conduct, and

those who had hitherto yielded occasionally to looseness of habits, feared to indulge themselves now lest they be turned from Mr. Elton's employ. This would undoubtedly have been the case had any lawlessness been proven. And of a truth, he "gathered up the fragments of time that nothing be lost." By personal effort he has gathered up from the byways and alleys a number of ragged, neglected, outcast boys, and with these he has founded a mission school; from his own purse furnishing them with appropriate clothing. Through the week his interest in his class does not abate, but he joins his effort with theirs to find them employment. Thus actively engaged in Christian work, he leaves himself no time for idle mourning, and wins the confidence and respect of all who know him.

Now let us take a passing glance at Nina Hudson. We find only a tired-faced girl, walking listlessly over the same route at certain hours of the day, as regularly as the days come around. She is teaching school.

At the McMurray homestead there are no boarders this summer to claim their attention. So Mrs. McMurray sits and knits during the long afternoons, and Stella finds much more time to spend with her books. This afternoon we find her equipped for a walk, and as she passes through the room where her mother is sitting, she volunteers this bit of information,

"I am going over the hill, mother, into the wood, to gather the mosses for my hanging-baskets."

"Now, don't go a pokin' about the woods, and get your hands all torn with the brambles, or snake-bitten, maybe."

"No, mother," and she steps out into the sunlight.

Down the familiar footpath toward the opening, past the bars, and through the narrow lane that led into

the great wood. She ascended a hill; then stopped a few moments, and turned around to take in the pretty rural picture. Just down in the hollow below her nestled the dear old farm-house, her home. To the left stood out in the distance here and there a white farm-house, and the public road winding its zig-zag course over hill and vale, like a thread upon a green carpet, and disappearing upon the summit of the hill whereon stood the little school house, within whose walls she had struggled through the first rudiments of her education. She turned around again, and resumed her walk. She gathered a little cluster of wayside flowers, and fastened them in her belt. The air seemed vocal with the songs of birds as they twittered to one another among the interlacing branches. So thoroughly did she enjoy all this that she well-nigh forgot her errand, until she came suddenly upon a little bed of soft, velvety moss, just the thing she wanted. Just at the foot of the hill ran the merry little brook she loved so well, and saying to herself, "I will go and hear it talk awhile, and gather this as I come back," she, without taking the longer and easier route, climbed down the rugged hillside, and stood on the bank. She smiled to see the reflection of her own sweet face in the clear, limpid water, and in a low, soft voice, scarcely loud enough to be heard above the gurgling of the brook, she sang—

"'I chatter over stormy ways,
In little sharps and trebles;
I bubble into eddying bays,
I babble on the pebbles.

"'With many a curve my banks I fret,
By many a field and fallow;
And many a fairy foreland set
With willow-weed and mallow.

"'I chatter, chatter as I flow,
To join the brimming river;
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever, ever,
I go on forever.'"

The sound of her voice quickly died away among the hills, but the brook sang on. Drawing her white shawl a little closer around her, she stepped over on the broad white rock, and sat down in her accustomed nook. Then she untied her hat and hung it on the limb of a sapling that bent over near her. She amused herself by dipping her hand in and out of the water to see the little ripples float away. Wearying of this she leaned her head upon her hand, and lulled by the restful voice of the water, was soon lost in delightful reverie. What a glorious picture she made of youth and joyousness and beauty, as she sat there perfectly unconscious of observation. Has she forgotten that this is Saturday afternoon?

Morgan Preston, out for his customary stroll, espied a hat with white ribbons tied to the bough, and knowing this to be a favorite haunt of Stella's, readily surmised that she was the owner of the aforesaid headgear, and turned aside to see. She did not become aware of his presence until he stood quite near her, and said in a cautious undertone,

"Nymph of the woodland glade!"

She started and looked around. He laughingly approached then, and said,

"Miss Stella, you looked so like a veritable woodnymph I feared the sound of a human voice would frighten you away."

"Do not be alarmed, Mr. Preston," she replied, rising. "I am perfectly accustomed to the sound of human voices. But how came you here?"

"Trespassing on your preserves? Well, I was passing nearby and saw what I hailed as a flag of truce floating in the breeze over your fortress, and concluding that you could not make war with me while those colors are flying, I came across. And that accounts for my breaking in upon your meditations so unceremoniously. Were they of a weighty character?"

"Oh, no, sir," laughing. "Now, pardon me if I hand back the question, and ask how came you here?"

"Sheer laziness, I think, and want of ambition for anything else. Praiseworthy motives, you'll admit, I am sure."

"I understand those symptoms well. But let us sit down. Here is a right comfortable seat, considering that art had nothing to do with its construction. Now tell me, sir, how you admire my sylvan retreat?"

"It is a charming little spot, indeed. If that little strip of sandy beach there could only be extended for a mile or so, what a promenade it would afford."

"Yes, equal to that at Tenby, in Wales—one of nature's finest. But I am determined to imagine that we excel in scenery, if Tenby can boast of the best promenade."

"Let us be practical, Miss Stella, and admit that although your imagination stretches easily, the promenade does not, and like the sour-grape story, make the best of it."

"I hope you don't think I am dissatisfied."

"You don't look like it, certainly." Then after a moment's silence, he said, "Did you know I intended coming over this evening?"

She answered, smiling,

"Indeed, sir, I had not the slightest idea of it. I seldom hold receptions here."

He laughed.

"No, not here, but at home."

"Well, no sir, again. You didn't say you were coming, did you?"

"No, but tell me, did you not *expect* me just a little?"

Then the color for a moment swept over her face, and she looked intently at the clean-looking pebbles under the water; for she was thinking of it at the very moment when he came up.

"Yes, a little," she answered.

"Why?" he questioned.

"Oh, just because you are in the habit of coming, I suppose."

"Do you think I have no better reason?"

She answered gravely,

"I do not know, Mr. Preston, and surmises are apt to be incorrect."

"Surely, Stella, you have divined the meaning of my visits." His voice was low and earnest, and she, half-divining, yet doubting, said nothing. He took one of her hands in his own, and said, "This is why I come. Because I love you, Stella. Could there be a better reason?"

His tender voice and gentle touch caused every fibre of her being to thrill with intense joy, but all in an instant a spasm of pain shot across her features, and she said faintly,

"Oh, don't, Mr. Preston, tell me that."

He could not see her half-averted face, and taking both her hands in his, said tenderly,

"Why should I not tell you that I love you, Stella? No more sacred feeling ever lived in a man's breast

than my love for you, and I have silently cherished it for so long that it has grown stronger than my will, and now I *must* speak." She feebly attempted to withdraw her hands, but he only held them closer, and in a voice peculiarly soft and low, said, "No, you cannot take them away until you have promised to give them to me. Will you not, Stella? I am vain enough to believe that you have not succeeded in shutting me out of your heart."

With a piteous appeal in her luminous eyes, she said,

"Oh, Mr. Preston, please do not tell me this."

"Why, Stella?" he asked in surprise.

"Because it never can be." He smiled incredulously, but released her hands. She stood before him trembling with every feeling of her heart fighting against her words. In a voice almost inaudible she said, "We are not suited to each other."

"Why are we not, Stella?" he answered in a grieved voice. Trying to be very brave she answered,

"You know we should be one in heart and mind, but we differ widely in our religious views."

A smile broke over his face again as he approached her, and said,

"Is that all? We will not allow that to separate us. All the best hopes of my life are centered in your love, Stella, and I will not be circumvented by a trifle."

He spoke almost sternly.

"It is not a trifle, Mr. Preston; it is an insurmountable barrier."

"Not unless you willfully make it so." Then speaking in the tender tone that goes right to a woman's heart, he said, "But you will not allow a mere difference of opinion like that to outweigh all my love for you."

Assuming all her self-command, she answered,

"Mr. Preston, my conscience and my Bible explicitly teach me not to enter into a union where soul and sentiment differ so widely as yours and mine. Do you not see we could never be happy?"

"No, I do not. I assure you I would not wish to interfere with your religious habits and belief. You should be as free as you now are. I would not, if I could, unsettle your faith. On the contrary, I sincerely admire it, and honestly wish that I could think as you do. Now, could we not be happy?"

"How could I be happy," she spoke vehemently, knowing that your soul, at bitter emnity with God, must inevitably be lost, and seeing continually before my eyes that awful, eternal separation?"

"Stella, if there is any human influence that can, in time, win me over to your way of thinking, it is yours. Your presence and example will warm into life all the good there is within me."

"Your own impulse and will should make you a man, independent of any other influence. And, Mr. Preston, I know your temperament too well to hope for anything from my influence. You are so positive, so decided, that if you become a Christian only God and yourself will accomplish it." She clasped her hands before her, and looking up into his face appealingly said, "And have I not pleaded with you to believe the truth? Have I not said all that I can say to convince you, and to no effect?"

He ceased to reason with her, and laying his hand lightly upon hers, said in a gentle undertone,

"Do you not love me, though, Stella, notwithstanding all my obduracy?"

She dared not lift her eyes to his face, but walked several steps away, and then answered,

"How could I, when I despise your most cherished doctrine?"

He stood where she had left him, and watched her, smilingly, complacently, then folding his arms across his broad chest, said,

"I cannot accept an evasive reply, Stella. I am entitled to a defiant answer. Will you tell me?"

Still with downcast eyes she answered tremulously,

"Isn't it impossible for me to—to love you?"

"Is it? Then raise your eyes to my face, and say you do not, and I will annoy you no further." His voice was very earnest and low. She did not answer. "Will you not answer, Stella?" he said after a moment. She looked into his eyes; her own were full of tears. But her words died on her lips, and dropping her face in her hands, she sobbed aloud. In an instant his arms were about her, and while holding her close to his loving heart, he said, in a voice almost impatient in its earnestness, "Why torture us both? Tell me if you love me, my darling."

She would have been more or less than human had she not been so imprudent as to answer,

"Yes."

"I knew it long ago, Stella, but I so longed to hear you say it." As he spoke he wound his hand caressingly among the silky ringlets that lay against his shoulder. "May I tell you how much I love you, darling?"

Quickly freeing herself from his embrace, and moving a few paces from him, she said,

"Oh, no; you must not tell me."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because we must not love each other."

"Can we help it!"

"We must try." Then with a sudden impulsive

motion she approached him again, placed her arms about his neck, and with her face upturned to his, spoke fervently, "Oh, Morgan, if you were only religious, if you only believed that God is the Father and Saviour of us all, how gladly would I promise to be your wife!"

"And you will?" he pleaded, reverently touching his lips to the blue-veined forehead.

Stepping away from him again she answered huskily,

"No—no, I cannot."

He did not approach her, but said, eagerly,

"Stella, you know that if any mortal power could induce me to promise to alter my principles, I would do it now. Do you not see that any promise of the kind made for the sake of a reward, no matter how coveted that reward may be, would be dishonest with myself and insincere?"

"Yes."

"Then what more can I say than this? Whenever I *can* believe as you do, I will." Then in a voice of desperate entreaty, "Now, Stella, don't ask me again to do that which you see I am powerless to do; but promise to be my wife. You shall never regret it."

"Don't make this any harder for me, Morgan, for I cannot."

"But you have said that you love me."

"God help me, I know it."

Two little twigs lay at his feet; he tossed them into the water, and said,

"Come, look, Stella." She obeyed. "Do you see how they are drifting apart, and every moment widens the distance? Just see; one has lodged among the *debris* about the rocks, while the other floats on unimpeded. Just so will our lives drift, Stella, if you

send me away to-day; for I will never seek you again."

"Morgan, I will pray God that your life-boat may not be stranded on the rock of infidelity. Oh, what a failure it would be, even though it went down amid a world's applause."

Every trace of a smile had left his face now, and there rested on it an expression of intense and bitter disappointment. She saw it, and laying her hand on his own, said,

"I will promise you this, Morgan: When you become a Christian, or at least relinquish all sceptical views, if it is ten years hence, and you want me, I will be your wife."

"I will not accept it," he answered somewhat proudly. "I want a promise without any proviso. If you send me away now, it is for all time, even though such a metamorphosis as you mention should take place. I have promised all that I can with honesty. Do you still adhere to your first words?"

"Morgan," she exclaimed, piteously. "I cannot do otherwise."

He turned upon her almost fiercely.

"You are laboring under a hallucination. Does the God whom you serve, and whom you call merciful and kind, require you to make this sacrifice? It is monstrous for Him to demand of you, his child, to shut out all human love and hope and joy from your life, merely to punish me, an already outcast." Then in a calmer tone and with an appealing look, he said, "Stella, once more I ask you, and think well before you answer, Will you be my wife?"

She looked into his handsome, noble, pleading face, and all her heart went out to him then, but she sobbed out rather than spoke,

"I cannot, I cannot. God help us both!"

They stood in utter silence for a moment, then he asked in calm, even tones,

"Shall I see you home, Miss Stella, or would you prefer to walk alone?"

For answer she came toward him. He untied her hat from the bough, and they started homeward. The moss and the baskets were forgotten, the sweet music of the birds unheeded, the springing flowers were crushed beneath their feet unnoticed, and the brightness of the sunlight seemed but a tremendous mockery. When they reached the gate he opened it for her to enter, then lifting his hat politely, bade her "good evening," and walked away. She was too dazed even to reply. Her mother met her on the threshold and said,

"My daughter, you look like a ghost. Are you sick or frightened?"

"No, mother; I am weary. Will you excuse me if I go to my room and do not come down to tea?"

"Yes, child, go. I'll bring you a cup of tea after a while."

"Oh, no, I do not wish it, thank you," and she passed on.

"What ails the child?" muttered the mother to herself. "She never come in lookin' like that afore. And she didn't get no mosses, neither; I hope she ain't a gittin' no fever."

CHAPTER XVII.

STELLA MCMURRAY, as we have said elsewhere, was a very practical young woman, and contrary to the conventional love-lorn girl, when she reached the refuge

of her room, she neither fainted, nor shrieked, but quietly determined within herself not to make everyone in the house miserable, but to bear up as bravely and cheerfully as she could. So she did not have brain-fever nor consumption, nor did she court any of the many methods by which we "shuffle off this mortal coil," but she calmly sat down, thought the matter over, and made the very best she could of it. The brave heart suffered, aye, bitterly, and life looked darker than she had thought it ever could, yet she felt the consciousness of having done right, although at a terrible sacrifice. Just as soon as she could bring herself to speak of it, she told her mother all the painful circumstance, how she had acted, and at what a cost. Dear, kind-hearted mother that she was, she sympathized with her daughter tenderly, and commended her for doing as she thought was right, and prudently shielded her in many after-instances, from remark and questioning. But ere the autumn months had flown, her watchful mother-love detected an unfavorable change in Stella's appearance. She had taken a task upon herself that she could not easily accomplish. Conscientiously she went through the usual routine of life from day to day, filling up her regular hours of work, read the paper to her father in the evenings, as she had always been accustomed to do, and attended church on Sundays with unvarying regularity, never complained nor seemed low-spirited; but there was lacking her usual vivacity and ambition, and keen relish of life. She had not seen Morgan Preston since she parted with him at the gate, and but rarely heard his name mentioned. Harry Elton had been her confidant in this as in most other matters since she had known him, and she sincerely prized his sympathy now, which he freely gave, together with many a word of encour-

ment and hopefulness. It was early in the winter that he came up to spend a few days, and although Preston's name was but seldom mentioned between them, yet he thought best, during his visit to tell her this,

"One of his associates whom I met recently informed me that Morgan Preston, having grown strangely gloomy and stern of late, has given up his studies in B——, and has gone to Chicago, where he is entirely absorbed in the study and practice of his profession."

And this was all she knew.

"Father," said Mrs. McMurray one morning, addressing her husband, "don't you think a little visit somewhere would be a good thing for Stella?"

"Well, I don't know. 'Pears to me she *does* seem kinder tired and restless here lately."

"I think so. She don't see nuthin' new around here to interest her, and everything puts her in mind of *him*. I just know that."

"Well, let her have a visit wherever she's a mind to go, and let her stay until she feels like comin' back. A little change that way is powerful good for anybody that's melancholy-like."

And just on the heel of this proposition, Harry Elton came, and at the first favorable opportunity said to Mrs. McMurray,

"Stella looks badly. She has undertaken a heavy burden. Let me take her home with me, won't you? I think we might brighten her up a little. Mother will be delighted te have her come, and they'll be a mutual advantage to each other."

"Why, yes;" she replied. "I'll be glad for her to go. I mentioned to father yesterday that we must send her away somewhere. Your mother is a very cheerful body. I'm sure Stella won't be lonely."

So Stella was interviewed on the subject, and being

used to doing pretty much as they wished, she readily consented to the arrangement. And we find her soon after, in the brightest, most cheerful room in Mrs. Elton's commodious house, and this lady using her best endeavors to please and enliven her guest. Surely in this most delightful of apartments she could not nurse a feeling of sadness. The walls were covered with pale blue and gilt paper, the soft carpet was of the same delicate hue, and all the appurtenances to correspond. Rich lace curtains drooped gracefully from the window and were held in place by tiny gilded hands. Some of the best authors and latest periodicals lay on the table, and two canary birds, swinging in the sunlight, sang almost constantly. And Stella did certainly seem to grow more like herself under these influences. And Mrs. Elton, while in her company, kept her continually talking, and always of something pleasant, and then, sly woman that she was, she would request Stella to go out in the city to do certain little errands for her whenever the days were bright and pleasant. Queer little errands she would find sometimes—a piece of ribbon matched for her bonnet, or an uncommon shade of velvet for her new wrapper; and not infrequently she would remember something that she wanted particularly to say to Harry that morning, in reference to business, and would Stella be so kind as to take a note to his office for her? And Mrs. Elton made the girl believe that she was conferring a great favor upon her by doing these things, when it was only a ruse to get her out of doors, and keep her mind off unpleasant subjects, having its origin and fulfilment in the kindness of Mrs. Elton's heart.

Amid these cheerful surroundings the girl really found little chance to be sad, but one evening Harry

came home earlier than usual, and found her crouched in a corner of the sofa in the back parlor crying. He came upon her suddenly, and before she had time to brush the tears away, sat down by her, and in his old free, affectionate way, drew her head down upon his shoulder, and said,

"Has the old wound opened afresh, little sister?"

"Oh, Harry," she sobbed, "it has never been healed, only hidden. I don't think I ever can feel as I once did."

Harry, poor fellow, thought this very probable, but he didn't tell her so. He only said,

"Are you sorry that you acted as you did? Would you go back and undo it if you could?"

She thought a moment, then answered,

"No, Harry, I am sure I would not."

"Then, Stella," he said, "you are doing wrong. You must hold your emotions in check better than this. I sympathize with you earnestly, for I know what it is, but now that you have shouldered the burden, you must try to be strong."

Endeavoring to dry her eyes, she said,

"I thought I could be brave, as you are, but I find myself a coward after all."

"No, not a coward, but unused to such severe discipline."

"This looks very ungrateful in me, after all that you and your mother have done to make me happy. I do appreciate it all, Harry, but I allowed my heart too much liberty this evening."

"Stella," he said, seriously, "it is for self-control that you are struggling. You will never outlive your love, poor child. You can only learn to hide it from the careless gaze of others. And to do this requires

constant vigilance. You must not allow your heart loose reins again."

"And will I never be happy again?" disconsolately.

"Certainly you will. Try to become interested in people and things, and as the days come and go, possibly some avenue of usefulness may open to you, and you will be happy in following it."

"That helps me to tell you, Harry, what I have been waiting to tell you for days. I believe I want employment—something to keep mind and hands both busy, away from home, you know."

"I believe it would be a very good idea," he said, after a moment's thought, "would you like teaching?"

"I think I would."

Then slapping his hand upon his knee, he said.

"I know the very place for you. A lady right here in the city, a friend of mine, wants a private instructress for three little girls."

"Tell me about them," already interested.

"Mrs. Martin and her family are very nice people, I think. I have called there several times. There are two children grown, a son and daughter. The three younger are probably ten, twelve and fifteen, respectively."

"I wonder if father and mother will allow me to take the position if I can get it."

"We'll write to them and see. If you decide to take it I think I can secure the place for you."

The parents offered no objection if Stella thought she could be better contented. At any rate she could but try, "and the moment you are dissatisfied, dear," they wrote, "come home." So Mr. Elton called upon the lady who wished to engage a governess, and recommended Miss McMurray as his friend. The usual

questions relative to her capabilities were asked and and satisfactorily answered, and upon Mr. Elton's recommendation she was engaged. He mentioned, however, that she was not necessitated to take this step, but did it of choice. Before entering upon her duties, she made a flying visit home, then returned, and Mr. Elton went with her to Mrs. Martin's. When he left her he extorted a promise that she would spend every Sabbath with his mother. She silently thanked God for such a friend, as he went away. At her request she was shown her duties at once. Mrs. Martin, a handsome, dignified, yet friendly woman, conducted her new *protege* up a wide staircase, and entering a large, comfortable room on the second fioor, told her that would be the school-room, and opening into it was the room designed for her—a cosy, comfortable little place; and bidding Stella enter and remove her wrappings, Mrs. Martin went out into the corridor, and passing along to another room, found three little girls all waiting in silent expectation to be presented to their new governess. Bringing them in she said,

"Here are the little ones, Miss McMurray, Minerva, the eldest, Helen, the next, and here is our baby, Maude."

Possessing a natural friendliness for children, she soon won their confidence, and Mrs. Martin, hoping that she would find them tractable and obedient, left them to themselves. The most of the day was taken up in getting thoroughly acquainted, and arranging their lessons for the next day. Stella's heart warmed toward the children at once, and, when alone in her own little room, she asked God to help her to teach them something beside that which tended only to mental advancement. At dinner hour Mrs. Martin came to her again, and asked if she would come down and dine

with the family, or would she prefer to have meals sent up with the children's?

"I will dine with the children to-day," she answered at once, but Mrs. Martin objected.

"You have not seen my older children, Miss McMurray, and I would like to introduce you."

"If you will excuse me, I will not go down to-day, thank you," she replied.

So, to their delight, she took her dinner with the children, and before eating, astonished them all by asking a fervent blessing on the meal. Maude, the youngest, and the most inquiring, unable to refrain from questioning, asked,

"Why do you do that, Miss Stella? We don't say anything here before we eat."

"Why, dear, I just thanked God for all these things, that is all. Every day He gives us what we need, and every day we should thank Him."

"But papa *buys* these things, Miss Stella, God don't send them to him."

Then the new teacher, seeing at once that a mission field was open to her, commenced by giving her pupils a lesson in religious science. And so well did she succeed in simplifying her teaching that even the little inquiring mind was satisfied. On the morning after her arrival Stella was formerly introduced to the son and eldest daughter. Mr. Philip Martin was a young gentleman of fine physique, polite, yet without those insinuating attentions that are annoying to strangers. Miss Lillie Martin was a delicate, fragile looking girl of about Stella's own age, sweet-tempered and winning in her manner. So, when Stella knew them all, she found herself very pleasantly situated, indeed; but she did not know how much Mr. Elton's recommendation as his own personal friend, had done for her in this

matter. If she supposed that all governesses were as kindly received, she was widely mistaken. Had Mrs. Martin employed a stranger, with references from strangers, she being a calculating woman, would not have received her into her family, as she did this girl whom Mr. Elton had brought as his friend; but she would have assigned her her own territory without any scruples, and then saw to it that she ventured not beyond it. But they dare not consider her beneath them who was Mr. Elton's personal friend. So Miss Lillie and Stella were soon on intimate terms, and Phil, as Lillie called her brother, soon came to spend more of his evenings at home than had hitherto been his custom. Before she had been many weeks in the family another thing became patent to Stella's observation. Lillie was engaged to be married. Every Thursday evening with mechanical accuracy, her lover came. Then Stella did not go to the parlor at all, but spent the evening with the children, and the consequence was they soon learned to look forward to Thursday evening with as much pleasant anticipations as Lillie did. Lillie's lover was a man very much older than she, and bearing in business circles a character beyond reproach. Stella often wondered, though, when seeing them together, if Lillie really loved him. She, such a tiny, winsome blossom of a thing, while he, so elderly and grave, and almost stern in his manner toward her. But she asked no questions, although Lillie became very confidential at times.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Our lives are better for the rain that falls into them. They who have known no sorrow have never felt the honey-dropping balm of consolation. We are nearer heaven after the ministry of grief. As the rain falls gently from the skies, so may all things lovely and of good report fall into our human hearts."

It was a blustering March day. The winds shrieked through the crevices, and howled around the corners, and moaned through the swaying tree-tops, and tore into the faces of those who were compelled to be out with such gust as almost to take away their breath. In one of the most unpretending-looking little houses in the suburbs of H——, sitting by a blazing wood-fire, listening to the roaring elements without, is Mrs. Miller, formerly Nina Hudson. The "plain, honest man," came along, and they were married three months ago, after a very brief courtship. There is a shadow of care on her features this evening, and she sits alone in the house, engaged with her domestic duties. Any observing stranger who would come into this humble dwelling and converse with Mrs. Miller for an hour, would know that she is fitted for something better than this. Yet this is what she has deliberately chosen. James Miller, her husband, is just the sort of man one would suppose that Nina Hudson would not marry under any circumstances. A man of very limited mental acquirements, not particularly prepossessing physically, with little or no culture, and with no ambition for anything higher. His moral character is good, though, and he is kind to his wife, and fond of her in his way. On one of the retired streets in the town you will see his sign in large letters, "James Miller, Haberdasher," whatever that means. From

this small business he realized a modest living but nothing more. Being in good circumstances Nina had entertained a secret expectation that his father would help him into better business. But in this she reckoned wrong. The old gentleman for reasons strictly known to himself, saw fit to allow James to struggle on alone. But with this little personal matter we have nothing to do. Suffice it to say, Nina was disappointed, but she bore it with nerve, and now we find this woman her own housekeeper, living as economically as possible, who had all her life been accustomed to a certain degree of ease and refinement. We must do Aunt Lovejoy the justice to say that she was by no means eager for this match. True, she had instilled into her niece's mind from infancy the principle that only the love of a "plain, honest man" was worth having; but in this instance the "plainness" was too obvious even for her. But in the face of all these facts Nina protested that she was satisfied, and that she had the "very best husband in the world." Well, perhaps she had, but other people knew that she was out of her groove in life; yet she settled into the new one with all the complacency she could assume. Steadfast in her religious duties, both in public and private, she did with her might what her hands found to do; and that even was a great deal. By dint of good management, the little income was made to supply their necessities, but at the end of the year there was nothing left over.

Now, let us look in upon our friends in B—— on this same stormy evening. Assembled in the parlor are Stella McMurray, Lillie and Mr. Martin, junior. The curtains are drawn so as to shut out the gathering darkness, and a bright fire burns in the grate. Stella has now been several months in Mr. Martin's family, and one needs not the second glance to see

that the change has been beneficial to her. Being brought into daily contact with these young, undeveloped, affectionate natures was just what she needed. In studying with them, and teaching and training them, she is recovering to a great extent the usual flow of spirits. Do not mistake my meaning, now, dear reader, and think she has forgotten her lover. That would be a great mistake. She is only learning the lesson that so many of us have to learn; resignation to the will of Him who, with a loving and unerring hand, marks out our lives. She has buried her heart in the memories of that evening by the brookside, and she prays to God daily so to order *his* life that *he* may become a Christian, and leaves all the rest with Him. She has determined to make her life a useful one wherever and however she may. In this family her influence is already beginning to tell. A few weeks after her introduction here, young Mr. Martin asked her one evening if she would accompany him to the theatre. Without any hesitancy she told him that, from conscientious principles, she never attended the theatre.

Of course there followed a pleasant little racy argument. He, like all other worldlings to whom theatre going is a pleasure, asked,

"What harm is there in it?"

She, Yankee-like, turned questioner, and asked,

"What possible advantage can a young Christian derive from a performance at the theatre, or, any young man indeed, who is striving for a moral character and to 'keep himself unspotted from the world?'"

He couldn't truthfully say that there was any real advantage to be gained for that sort of person, but then "there are excellent historical plays," he said.

"Those excellent plays keep very bad company, Mr. Martin," she replied, "and I would prefer to gather my knowledge of history from books."

As a "nail in a sure place," she ran upstairs and procured Rev. J. T. Crane's book on "Popular Amusements," that she had brought from home and read to him the following sentences:

"The theatre is said to be good place to learn history, human nature, and all that. Assuming this to be true, it might not be out of place to inquire how often these *good* plays are performed, and how they 'draw.' What proportion does this good sort bear to the general mass of plays nightly set before the public? To plead for the theatre on the ground that its moral influence is good is to act a bigger farce than was ever put upon the stage. The whole thing is one of strategy and calculation. As the skilful angler puts on his hooks the bait at which the fish will bite most easily, no matter what it is, so the crafty manager of a theatre surveys society and considers what plays will attract the crowd. He is aware that the really religious portion of the community regard the church and theatre as antagonists, and look upon him as one who is laboring to undo all that they are trying to accomplish. He knows that many people of culture and high social position regard his profession as dishonorable and degrading. These classes he leaves out of his calculations, because they are beyond his reach. But a great multitude remain, composed in part of the young and the heedless, fond of noise and show and excitement, and in part, of the corrupt and the vile, and among these he must find his patrons and his profits. In aiming to gather them into his fold, he must gratify their peculiar taste. Will he do this by means of plays which, from the first line to the last, brand vice as infamous, and exalt virtue and honor? He knows his calling better. The people who compose his audience do not come to the theatre to be made ashamed of themselves. They would not listen to such a play. It is true that a few who are moral and res-

pectable are sometimes found at the play-house, but they are so few that play-writers and stage managers, having an eye to the financial receipts and successes, look in other directions, and graduate the plot, and the sentiments, and the scenes, and the costumes of the performers, for a lower moral level."

Then closing at once the book and the argument, she looked at him coyly, and said,

"That settles the question to my entire satisfaction. Now, sir, if you will give Lillie and I the pleasure of hearing Dr. T—— to-night at the Institute, we will be under great obligations."

"I will, with pleasure," was the cordial reply. On another occasion he came in and handed her a ticket to a famous opera, and asked the pleasure of her company. She thanked him cordially, chided him playfully, and declined going. "Well, where can I take you?" he asked in mock despair.

Playfully she asked,

"Mr. Martin will you really take me where I wish to go, even at the risk of being bored yourself?"

"Why, certainly I will," he answered.

"Well, there is to be a meeting in E—— street church to-night in the interest of missionary work, in which you know I am interested. There will be addresses by several eminent workers, and I would like very much to go."

"I am at your service," was the quick response.

"Thank you ever and ever so much."

Thus we see that the young gentlemen went less often to places of amusement, and more frequently where solid good could be obtained; and even if no permanent results should follow this influence, so much time is gained at any rate. As for the little girls, they loved Miss Stella dearly, and would try

hard to accomplish anything she asked of them. They were not identified with any Sabbath school, and at Stella's request they spent Sabbath afternoons with her in her room, where she taught them precious Bible truths in such a simple, interesting manner, that they soon learned to love their Sunday exercises. It is no wonder that in this wholesome atmosphere her spirits revived. She had found something to do, and was doing it to the very best of her ability. Now, after this somewhat lengthy digression, we will come back to the trio grouped together on the sofa.

"Ugh!" said Lillie, shrugging her dainty shoulders, "how the wind shrieks."

Stella jokingly remarked,

"I expect you are glad it isn't Thursday evening."

"I suppose I ought to be," was the ready answer.

"Now, Mr. Martin, let us hear from you."

The young gentleman addressed struck an attitude, and in a tragic tone repeated,

"'The thunders crash up with a roar upon roar,
And the eddying lightnings flash fire in my face,
And the whirlwinds are whirling the dust round and round,
And the blasts of the winds universal leap free
And blow each upon each with a passion of sound,
And æther goes mingling in storm with the sea!
Oh, Æther enringing
All eyes with the sweet common light of thy bringing,
Dost see how I suffer this wrong?'"

Lillie put out her hand with a gesture of entreaty, and said,

"Spare us, Phil, please. No college recitations for us this evening. Come down to our level, and tell us of that beautiful Julia whom you used to rave about."

"Is it possible, Lil, that you have so little appreciation of the lofty and sublime?"

Stella spoke up,

"Indeed, Mr. Martin, I would like to hear the whole poem, but Lillie has aroused my curiosity. Why have you kept me so long in the dark about your 'beautiful Julia?' Do tell us something about her. To use a favorite expression of that dashing Miss Ashton who called yesterday, 'I am dying to know.'"

"Perhaps Lillie has some more interesting facts in her possession that she could give you," said the young man, pleasantly.

"No, I have nothing more to communicate. We will be glad to hear you expatiate at length."

"Pray go on, Mr. Martin," said Stella, "We know you want to talk about her, and we will be interested listeners."

"Do you mean Miss Starr?" he asked, turning to his sister.

"To be sure."

"Well, I was introduced to Miss Starr at the theatre, a little less than a year ago. She is quite stylish in her appearance, and on this particular occasion was gorgeously gotten up. Solomon in all his glory never dreamed of such an outfit, I know. It was this, perhaps, that led me to mention her name to Lillie. That is all I know."

"It isn't much, I am sure," said Stella, "and I conclude that it isn't a very bad case after all."

"Stella, he's keeping something back," said Lillie, gaily. "If you could have heard him rave about her magnificent eyes and wealth of auburn hair."

"Ah, Lil," said the young man laughing, "you are wasting ammunition. You can't make out a case against me."

Stella joined in the laugh, and turning to Lillie said,

"Probably you are right. I know it is a character-

istic of his 'sect,' as Samantha says, to withhold just the information you want," then turning to Mr. Martin she said, "For my part I will not ask you to confess any further in regard to this Starr of the first magnitude (excuse a pun), if you will allow me to suggest a plan for our better entertainment this evening."

"Certainly, Miss Stella. What is your suggestion?"

"That you will read something aloud for our benefit.'

"I never give public readings," he replied, sagely.

"Please do not refuse," she pleaded. "You know I seldom have the pleasure of hearing another read."

"I yield," with resignation stamped on every feature.

"Thank you."

After a little discussion they decided that he should take the ancient poem from which he had just given them a startling quotation, and read from it such portions as he admired. The young man was a good reader, and when he finished they fell to discussing its merits and eloquence, and comparing it with productions from our modern poets.

Stella asked if they were familiar with a poem entitled "God," written by Derzhavin, the Russian poet. They were not.

"It is a marvel of eloquence," she said.

"I am sorry we haven't it."

"I have a copy in my portfolio," she replied, "written in pencil. I will get it." She ran upstairs and in a few minutes reappeared with the portfolio. They gathered around the center table, and she, producing the poem, said, "I suppose I will have to follow you in reading, Mr. Martin, as this is my own writing and

a hurried copy." When she finished the poem and they were still commenting upon it, she said, "I have here a prose translation also. Hear the ninth verse or paragraph: 'I am a bond between all worlds everywhere existent—I am the utmost limit of being—I am the centre of living things—the initial stroke of Divinity—in My body I perish in dust corruptible—in My Spirit I command the storms—I am a tsar—I am a slave—I am a worm—I am God! But marvellous as indeed I am—whence did I have My being? unknown! But by Myself I could not have been.' Isn't it fine?"

"Very. When did this poet flourish?"

"About a century and a half ago; or possibly a little less."

"Perhaps you have something else as good among those papers."

"No, sir; nothing so good as that."

But the evening was not to go by without its little unexpected happening.

In taking out a handful of papers something fell on the floor near Lillie. It was a photograph. She picked it up, glanced at it, said "Oh!" involuntarily, turned pale, and the picture dropped from her fingers to the floor again. Stella knew in an instant what it was, noticed Lillie's too evident confusion, and with perfect self-command picked up Morgan Preston's picture, and passing it carelessly to Mr. Martin, said,

"Do you know this face?"

"Know it?" surprisedly, "I should think I do. Morg. and I were chums at college. Is he a friend of yours?"

"Yes, I have known him all my life, more or less, intimately." Lillie regained her self-possession in a

moment, and receiving the picture from her brother's hand, said, "It is very much like him."

"He's a tip-top fellow," continued the young man. "Where is he, Miss Stella, and what is he doing? He used to visit here right frequently when we were college mates, and afterward, but it has been now quite a while since I heard from him or of him."

"He is in Chicago, now, I think, practising medicine." She took the picture quietly and dropped it among the leaves of her portfolio; then rising she said, "I will now return this to its place, and if you will excuse me, I will not come down again this evening."

But she was destined not to get off so easily. Just then the door bell rang, and she heard Harry Elton's voice in the hall inquiring for her, and in another moment he was shown into the parlor. After the usual greetings he said,

"Have you been entertaining your friends with original manuscript, Stella? I see you have your portfolio."

"No, I have been reading a copied poem."

Then she told him what it was.

"Oh, yes, it is very fine."

"Harry, what made you come out to-night? It isn't fit for any one to be out unless it is on important business," said Stella in all the frankness of her heart.

"Well," he replied, laughing heartily, "if this isn't a pretty question to ask a fellow after battling with old Boreas for ten squares to get to see you."

"I am sure I appreciate it heartily, Harry."

Then after a few commonplaces, Mr. Martin and his sister withdrew. As soon as they were alone Mr. Elton moved his chair near hers and said,

"Here, Stella, I have something for you to read."

Taking a paper from his pocket he pointed to a

paragraph and handed it to her. It was the announcement of Nina Hudson's marriage. Stella was so completely taken by surprise that her expression was almost as blank as Lillie's had been an hour before. And he looked as sad and hopeless as he did on that night a long while ago, when he came home and told her that Nina had said him "Nay."

"Don't think of her, Harry," was her first unstudied exclamation.

"Very likely you will never hear me mention her name again."

"When did this take place?"

"Three months ago. The paper has lain on my office table unopened all that time."

"It is well if she hasn't made three lives miserable."

"She knows her own heart, of course. As for me, my day-dream was a very brief one, and very bright; but it is over now. I hope she is happy. And I may be, too, after a while."

"We are made purer and better by suffering, Harry; there is such a weight upon my heart continually."

"Why don't you lay it where it belongs, Stella? There's a burden-bearer."

"I do, Harry, but I take it up again when I sit thinking."

"Then you must not give yourself a chance."

"While we are talking, tell me this: Did *he* ever pay any attention to Lillie Martin?"

"I think not. I have known her ever since she has been in society; have met her often but never with him, nor have I heard their names mentioned together. Why?"

Then she told him the little circumstance with which

the picture was connected, and what had been said about him.

"When he used to visit here Miss Lillie may have become a little more fond of him than he intended or desired she should; but that is not his fault. There is that about him that is very attractive. Will you let me see the picture, Stella?"

"Certainly," and she unlocked the portfolio and gave it to him.

"It is very like him," he said.

"Yes, very," and the mists gathered in her eyes as she looked at it earnestly. "I do hope that some day the grace of God may permeate his heart."

"I hope so, too, Stella, sincerely. See, it is ten o'clock—I must be going. Don't you know it is getting awfully lonesome around at our house Sundays?"

"Is it?"

"Yes, indeed, but I guess you are in the line of duty."

"I think so, Harry, and I know you would be the last person in the world to seek to turn me from it."

"But we miss you very much."

"Thank you. I am glad the wind has fallen somewhat," she said, as she went with him to the door. She bade him "good-night," then went upstairs to her room. Her last waking thought was this:

"Alas, how easily things go wrong. Why should she care at seeing his picture, and she so soon to be married. Poor Lillie! Poor child!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"He was a strong man, mail-clad, one whose part
From childhood upward it had been to bear,
But the great God—O God! how great Thou art—
Knew where the weak spot was, and smote him there."

MONTHS come and go, and it is Autumn again. The leaves are turning sere and yellow and brown, and are dropping one by one, noiselessly to the ground. The nights are cool and frosty, and the days balmy, still and delightful. In the voyage of life, as in nature, there comes to us the rainbow and storm, bright days and dark days, sunlight and gloom. Silently as the Frost-king paints his rare and wondrous picture, so imperceptibly into the happy home circle, hitherto unbroken, had the relentless form of death been stealing. Mrs. Preston, the loving wife, the tender mother, the quiet, unobtrusive, helpful friend, is gradually yielding to the fiat of nature. Pulmonary consumption is doing its fatal work. A stout woman is installed as housekeeper, and the little quiet figure that used to go in and out on errands of mercy, sits now all the day long in the cushioned chair, and the fair, emaciated hands lie idly in her lap, that were so deft in deeds of love and kindness.

A letter freighted with the sad intelligence that his mother is ill, has reached Mr. Preston in Chicago, and this morning the stage leaves at the gate a bronzed and bearded man, with a stern and gloomy countenance, who comes hurriedly up the path and enters unannounced, the room where the invalid sat. She held out both hands at sight of him, and a smile of glad welcome irradiated her face, but she was too weak to rise to meet him. "Morgan, my son," was

all she said. He stood a moment transfixed, as if scarcely crediting his senses, then quickly approaching, took the frail form into his strong arms, and kissing the pallid face again and again, said,

"Mother, why *did* you not send for me before?"

"I did not want to alarm you, my dear, until I knew there was just cause."

"If I had known, nothing could have kept me from you, my precious mother." Gently he placed her again in her chair, and arranged the cushions about her. Then she bade him, "Come, and sit close by me." He did as he was bidden. She ran her slender fingers through the rich masses of auburn hair, and smoothed the brown curling beard affectionately, and said, "You will excuse me, dear, if I am childish. It has been so long since I saw you." He tried to answer her with a smile, but the sight of that wan face made his heart ache so, that it was but a miserable attempt. He arose and drew the curtain so as shield her eyes from the bright sunlight. "Thank you, dear," she said, "You have learned to anticipate an invalid's wants, I see. Surely I will be better, now that you have come, and we will have many a nice long talk together." But he knew she was only trying to be buoyant and hopeful for his sake, and he was too well skilled in these matters to be easily deceived.

Presently the father came in, and with a smile of commingled sadness and gladness greeted his boy. These boys are always boys, never men, to their parents. Dr. Preston's entire attention was now given to his mother. But alas, that humanity is so weak. His hands could bring but temporary relief, and day after day he saw her life ebbing slowly but surely away. Science with all her researches has failed to find the elixir of life. As time wore on and she be-

came too weak even with assistance to walk to or from her bed, he carried her in his strong arms, ever so tenderly, morning and night. Self was forgotten entirely in those days of dreary watching and care. He had just settled her comfortably by the window, one bright morning, when she said, "Morgan, won't you read for me this morning?"

"Certainly, mother," he replied, "only command me and I will obey." She handed him her Bible.

"Where shall I read?" he asked.

"Anywhere. It is all rich with hope and love and precious promises." He opened at the fifteenth chapter of Corinthians, and while he read, her heart was lifted to God in prayer for him. There was a great deal in it that suited each case, although they were widely dissimilar. When he finished, and closed the book she repeated after him slowly, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. The victory over sin and death through the merits and suffering of his blessed Son. Morgan, I have not yet spoken to you on the subject which lies nearest my heart, your soul's eternal welfare; but, son, I have done more than speak to you. I have been praying for you for many, many months. How do stand toward God and eternity, my son?"

"I have read the book you gave me, mother, as I promised, with one or two argumentative works on scriptural subjects."

"Did the arguments bring you nearer the truth, dear?"

"I expect you will hardly think so," he answewed smilingly.

"Morgan, there is argument enough in the chapter that you have just read, if joined with the least measure of faith to convince the whole world of the efficacy

of the atonement, the great truth that St. Paul received from God by inspiration, that the dear Saviour came into the world to save sinners, and in verification of the prophecies of the Old Testament, died in our stead to make atonement for our transgressions and reconcile us to God. And the truth of his resurrection is fully attested by those who were not deceived themselves nor were under any temptation to deceive others. And if He rose from the dead, a fact which St. Paul has abundantly proven, then shall we also be resurrected, either to happiness or misery, according to our living here."

In the same pleasant manner he answered again,

"If according to our living here, then, mother, I think I'm tolerably safe. To use a trite saying, 'I never drove a six horse wagon through the ten commandments.' Say, now, mother, dear, haven't I been a pretty good boy all my life?"

"Morally, yes, dear. But your nature must be changed. You must be spiritually born again. How much rather would I hear you say, 'God be merciful to me a sinner;' than 'thank God I am not as other men are.' Divest yourself entirely of the idea, my son, that a correct life will save you, until you have been washed in the blood of the atonement."

"There is so much about it, mother, that I cannot comprehend. So much that is mystical. How can the dead who have lain in the earth for centuries, until their bodies have dissolved into dust, and become part of other bodies, be quickened again and reanimated into a like body as at first?"

"You do not need to comprehend it. It is no more essential that we should understand this process than it is for us to answer that question over which ontologists and geologists have cavilled for years, whether

the earth was created in six days, according to our measurement of time, or six millions? The one is just as possible with God as the other. Are there not mysteries in nature that you do not understand?"

"Yes, mother."

"But you do not doubt their truth because you cannot explain their existence."

"No; for that they do exist is proven by absolute knowledge"

"Morgan, cease striving vainly to unravel those mysteries that God has purposely hidden from you. You destroy his divinity when you expect to comprehend all his purposes. He is an infinite, self-existent Being, while we are poor human, finite creatures, debarred by our very natures from comprehending his motives. It is enough for us to know that he has so simplified this one fact as that all may understand it, how that He sent his only Son into the world that by his sufferings and death we may have eternal life. Do you believe this, my son?"

"That is the fundamental doctrine of the New Testament," he replied.

"You evade a direct answer." Her voice trembled from weakness and emotion. "Morgan, do you know that when the first snow falls it will cover the place wherein my feeble body will have found rest?"

His whole manner changed instantly, and he said quickly,

"Oh, mother, don't say that."

"I am only repeating what you must have known before," she said. Then pitifully she asked, "Do you love me, Morgan?"

"Mother, how can you ask me that?" and his face told how deeply he felt it, "you know that I love you as dearly as any precious mother ever was loved."

"Then would you have this separation that must shortly come, a final one, or would you see me again?"

"Oh, if it were only possible." Then in a manner almost rebellious, he said, "Mother, *if* your God is a God of love, *if* He has all power, and *if* we are immortal, and *if* there is a place of rest and reunion beyond the grave, why, in mercy, did He not make it all so plain to us that there could be no possibility of a mistake? Why leave such vital themes enveloped in so much mystery? Here we are, irresponsible for our own existence, for a few years the football of circumstances, then gone. How can I *possibly* know that this marvellous doctrine which you unquestionably believe, is not all a myth? You tell me to 'believe.' How can I believe with nothing tangible to base a belief upon?"

"Every objection that you have named is fully answered in the Bible. You have no reason to doubt any statement within its pages. But you are tenaciously clinging to those terrible 'ifs.' God forbid you should make of them a barrier to keep you out of heaven. What did you just read? 'If in this life only we have hope we are of all men most miserable.' But our hope spans the grave and touches a blessed immortality. God never gave us this unchangeable love to be forever sundered after a few brief years, and those checkered with trials and tears. Dear, is there any pleasure in the apprehension that we must shortly separate and forever?"

"None, mother, none. It is a horrible thought."

"Then relinquish it, my son."

"I cannot, mother. Your bewitching theory does not give me a foothold. Tell me this: If Christianity is true, and the Bible is simple enough for all to understand its meaning, why do religious denomina-

tions differ so widely in their belief? One sect will take the Bible and pretend to prove that there is no place of future punishment; another from the same Book will prove the exact opposite. Some Christian teachers preach probation after death, others pronounce such doctrine monstrous, some preach election and reprobation, others that all are alike eligible to salvation. And so they differ and argue and cavil over their creeds and ceremonials. Why don't they all see alike?"

"There is no division among Christians in regard to fundamental truths. All churches in good standing teach the immortality of the soul, the universality of the Atonement, the vicarious death of Christ, the reward of the faithful and punishment of the wicked. If they differ on minor points, what matters it? Isn't it the same with all professions or classes of people? Take your own, the medical profession, for instance. Isn't it by the free interchange of different opinions that you are able to get at the best?"

"That is a human institution altogether, and 'to err is human.' But for Christianity you claim divine origin. And really, mother, it seems to me that if religion is all that you good people claim for it, its ministers would be so concerned about eternal destinies as to lose sight of the insignificant matter of formulas. The Bible teaches but one road to heaven, and that narrow and straight; but I find Christian people branching off in every direction."

"Narrow and straight, my son, yet wide enough for every earnest, repentant, and regenerate child of Adam to walk therein. The little difference of opinion that your strained imagination magnifies into such proportions, simply serves to promote activity in Christian work, and engenders no confusion in the

ranks of God's followers. His ministers, God's anointed children, may be intensely concerned about eternal destinies, yet using slightly different means to reach the same end. Oh, Morgan, my darling boy, why persistently fortify yourself with frivolous arguments for the sake of the terrible alternative, your soul's inevitable doom! Must I, indeed, carry with me to the grave this insupportable burden?"

Dr. Preston looked at his mother, and noticed that her face was flushed and gave evidence of great excitement. He was alarmed, and said soothingly,

"Mother, dear, I fear you are talking too much. I should have been more thoughtful. I fear I have wearied you. Will you lie down a little while?"

"No, dear. If I could but see you, my son, brought into the fold of Christ, I would be more than willing to drop my life-burden right here. Oh, Morgan, God is *so* good; but you are not only slighting his inimitable grace, but trampling beneath your feet, cruelly, the blood of the Holy Covenant which alone can hide your guilt. Yet, 'He saves to the uttermost.' My child, what can I say to show you the peril in which you are living?"

He looked very much concerned. He could not conceal that. He drew his chair nearer his mother, and with one arm supporting her, he rested her head upon his shoulder and said, firmly,

"Mother, you must not talk any more just now. You are too prodigal with your strength this morning. Now, just lie there quietly and I'll read to you."

"If you will promise me one thing, dear."

"What is it, mother? You know I will promise you anything in reason."

"If you would only pray. Morgan you *must* pray. You believe that somewhere in the economy of nature

there exists a cause that created a universe. Embody that something. Call it God. Pray to Him. Ask for a consciousness that Christ is the Son of the living God—your Mediator and Redeemer. Ask Him to bring into subjection your obstinate will, and save you from impending ruin. Will you do this, my son?"

It was a hard question for Dr. Preston. How could he answer it? It meant the giving up of many dearly-bought opinions, but his mother asked it—and she was nigh unto death. A few moments' silence and he said in a low voice,

"Mother, surely you do not realize what you are asking."

"I know it means much to you, dear, but I am going away. How can I leave you, not unsaved only, but barricading yourself against God? Morgan, you will not refuse this one only request."

Her voice trembled with earnestness.

The struggle was a hard one, but brief, and he answered with firm-set lips,

"I promise."

"Then all will be right, and I am content."

With a smile she laid her head back on the cushions and closed her eyes restfully. She knew he would not deceive her; her truthful, honest, noble boy; and she knew God would not deceive her, and He had said, "*Whosoever* cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."

CHAPTER XX.

"Ane amaist fears to pity him, lest we wrang fortitude sae majestical."

A HUSHED and darkened chamber, a few weary watchers moving noiselessly about, sad faces and

subdued voices. Over the whole house brooded an awful silence, for Mrs. Preston lay dying. Human love and skill could accomplish nothing more, and now the stern Angel of Death, with his icy fingers is stilling the heart-throbs. Leaning over her, holding her two nerveless hands in his own, almost as cold, stood her son, eager to catch every whisper that might fall from those dearly loved lips. In the room were gathered the minister and two or three kind neighbors. Taking her husband's hand she laid it in her son's, saying,

"Henry, guide and counsel our boy when I am gone. And, Morgan, be the comfort and support of your father in his declining years. It will be but a little while until we meet again, all at home."

She closed her eyes, and for a while they thought she slept. Presently she opened them and said in a faint voice.

"Morgan, you have been praying?"

"Yes, mother."

Clasping her emaciated hands she closed her eyes and said,

"Oh, God, my Father, in this the day of my sore extremity, hear me, I pray! One more blessing from Thy inexhaustible treasure-house. from whence I have been drawing supplies all through a long life, and then Thou wilt receive me into the rest that remaineth for the faithful through infinite riches of grace! Father, take me not hence without giving me first to know that Thou wilt redeem from the dominion of sin this, my precious boy. *It is Thy will.* For his redemption Thou didst come into the world, was persecuted, insulted and slain. Enlighten his mind, show him the enormity of his sin and the magnitude of divine grace. Give him but a faint knowledge of the depth of the meaning of those words so graciously

given us: 'God so loved—*so loved* the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever—*whosoever* believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life!' Cleanse his heart, then take up Thy abode therein, and let Thy life glow in his life with the brightness of eternal noonday! I am standing at the threshold, Father; for the sake of Thy Son, our Saviour, hear this, my last prayer!"

Dr. Preston knelt by the bedside and buried his face in his hands. For some moments the silence was oppressive. Then, with voice growing perceptibly weaker, she said,

"Morgan." He lifted his white face and bent over her. "I will soon be going now. God has surely heard me. Continue to pray and He will break unto you the bread of life, and fit you for an inheritance in His heavenly kingdom." After a moment, "And read the book I gave you, my son. Will you?"

"Yes, mother."

"Then it is well. Oh, how the goodness of God is manifested to me! For He gives me to know that around my son, once enveloped in the darkness of sin, soon will shine the light of God's reconciled countenance." The life-tide was fast ebbing away. He raised her gently, and in a little while she spoke again. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. 'He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life.' 'Whosover will, let Him come and partake of the water of life freely.' These promises are for you, my son. Thank God for his marvellous love!" She was sinking now rapidly, and could speak but a few words without resting. "Then, dear, when you have brought your penitent heart with your life in earnest consecration to Him, He will prove, oh, such a refuge! Hear what tenderness: 'He shall cover thee with his feathers,

and under his wings shalt thou trust.' And what security: 'He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.' Dear, I have tested those promises. And now, 'Though I walk through the valley and shadow of death, He is with me,' and, oh, so precious!"

Her face was perfectly luminous. Pain, suffering and sorrow with all the grief and bitterness of parting were forgotten now in this flood-tide of happiness. The minister sang softly—

"'Oh, how sweet it will be in that beautiful land,
So free from all sorrow and pain;
With songs on our lips and with harps in our hands
To meet one another again.'"

Then came faintly these words,

"And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying."

"Morgan—are you here, my son?—I cannot see you."

"Yes, mother, I am here," he answered, while the hot tears fell upon her face.

"And this is death," she said. "Why, it is nothing. Only a step—and that, leaning on Jesus," Her words were almost inarticulate. "Henry—I will be—your guardian angel—and Morgan's—until you come." They thought she had gone, but in a moment her lips moved again, and Morgan, with his ear bent close to her lips, heard faintly,

"Morgan—you promised—to pray?" He pressed her hand in answer. Then, "Glory be to God—who giveth—us the vic—tory—through—our—Lord;" and the beautiful verse was finished in heaven.

With his tears falling fast upon the pallid face, Morgan reverently laid his mother down.

"Let us pray," said the man of God.

And from this room, made sacred by the presence of angels, and awful by the presence of Death, he offered up a prayer to Heaven, not for the departed, but for those whom she had left, that He would minister consolation to the sorrowing, and comfort the bereaved; but more than all, that He would bless with his great salvation him who had been for years the subject of a mother's prayers. When the prayer was ended, Dr. Preston arose and walked out on the porch. The sun was just rising. The gray dawn of early morning had vanished, and from the east there shot up bright rays and gleams of golden light, and in a few minutes, as he stood watching, appeared the great orb of day, dazzingly beautiful in its effulgence.

"What a glorious emblem," he thought. "And can it be possible that the spirit of my precious mother has just entered a world so far surpassing this in brilliancy, beauty and happiness, as the light of yonder sun surpasses the blackest midnight? Oh, mystery of mysteries! Great God, where'er Thou art, reveal this unto me!"

When the dear form was by gentle hands robed for the grave, Dr. Preston entered the room alone where it lay, and closing the door, knelt, and pressing his feverish cheek against that other so cold, wept as only the strong can weep.

"Oh, God!" he prayed, "my mother's God, comfort me. Since I've been a man I've known little else save disappointment and sorrow, and now Thou hast taken from me this loving, and faithful, and patient one, upon whose face my tears and kisses never before fell unheeded. Oh, hear me, if Thou canst give peace!

If it were not for that terrible, possible hereafter, how gladly would I now lie down and be at rest, and forgotten!"

The funeral day came at length. Friends gathered in from near and far, and with solemn faces whispered words intended for consolation, the habiliments of mourning were brought, the dead was coffined, and even the sad privilege of gazing through blinding tears upon the dear features was forbidden. In solemn procession they moved to the churchyard. Husband and son, arm in arm, stood by and heard the dull thud of the first shovelful of earth that fell upon the coffin lid, heard the "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," saw the grave implements passed from one to another until the mound was heaped up, then turned away and went back to the desolate hearthstone. Only those who have lain away some loved one know what it is to come back to the death-visited home, where every room and every article one sees is hallowed by some sacred reminiscence of the dead. But the current of life's mighty river bears us on in spite of woe or gladness, joy or sorrow.

As the enshrouded corpse of the brave sailor, when consigned to the deep, leaves scarcely a ripple on its clear surface, so though our hearts are torn and bleeding, and the insurging waves of anguish seem to engulf our very souls, yet the tide of humanity moves on as before, and we and our griefs are soon forgotten. Happy it is for us then that life's duties and cares come in and demand our attention. So it was with Dr. Preston. He had left a good practice in Chicago in the hands of a worthy physician until he should return. And he had arranged his affairs so hurriedly on hearing of his mother's illness as to be almost regardless of consequences. But now he must see after them.

After a little persuasion his father consented to return with him to Chicago, Morgan agreeing to come home if his father found himself dissatisfied with his new mode of life. So a trusty tenant was procured, and the farm rented for a year. And in a month after, Dr. Preston and his father were comfortably quartered in Chicago.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE long winter evening has begun. At the grand old piano in the parlor at Mrs. Martin's in B—— sits Stella McMurray playing softly to herself. They were weird bits of music she was weaving, sad and low and plaintive, like the faint murmur of some gentle woodland breeze. Her dress is of sombre hue, relieved here and there by a simple knot of blue, and her hair still clings to her shapely head in obstinate ringlets. A trifle more subdued she looks and woman-like than she did a year ago. There is an absent look on her quiet face as she sits in the deepening twilight pouring out her heart in music. The door opened softly, and Philip entered the room.

"All alone, Miss Stella?" he asked cheerily.

"Save the spirits of melody that are hovering about somewhere," she replied.

"They are hidden away in your fingers," he answered, gallantly, "for they only come at your magic touch."

"Thank you. I love the glad little elves so, I guess that is why they keep me company sometimes."

"What were you playing?"

"Nothing," she answered, with a bright smile.

"Oh, I know," with a merry laugh, "you were scooping around after the 'Lost Chord.'"

"No, indeed," was the laughing rejoinder, "the whereabouts of the 'lost chord' doesn't trouble me in the least. There are so many chords that have not been lost that I do not miss the unfortunate one. Now listen," and she glided into a selection from Beethoven —mournful, touching, tender strains. "Isn't it pretty?" she asked, looking up into his face.

"Yes, very," shrugging his shoulders, "but somehow it chills me. I want to hear you sing. Let me toss up these accompaniments and we will find something, surely," and he proceeded accordingly to play havoc with a formidable pile of music that lay on the instrument in front of him. She secured "Under the Daisies," when it came to the surface, and placed it before her. "Oh, no; not that, please," he entreated. "I never could endorse that sentiment. Let's find something with a suggestion of life in it."

With her fingers on the keys she playfully remarked,

"Your majesty is unusually fastidious this evening. Suppose you improvise something exactly suited to your taste."

"Now, don't be ironical, Miss Stella. You know I have about as much musical talent as a bear. But here is something, 'Kathleen Mavourneen.' Do you like it?"

"Fairly well."

She played and sang it for him, then when he had thanked her, he walked across the room, sat down on the sofa, and tantalizingly held up a letter, saying,

"See what I've brought you."

"And how unimportant you must have thought it," with mock severity.

"Come, sit here and read it."

She sat down near him and broke the seal. It was from one of her schoolmates in B—— county, and in the missive was mentioned casually the death of Mrs. Preston, and then as if the name brought up a recollection of her niece, the writer went on to say that Mrs. Miller had become suddenly widowed. "A terrible accident on the P. W. and B." she wrote, "and Mr. Miller was killed with several other passengers."

As Stella sat there reading, Mr. Martin sat watching the changes on her face. Sadness, surprise and sympathy were all struggling for the mastery at once. An amused smile was playing about the corners of his mouth when she finished reading and looked up at him.

"Are you laughing at me?" she asked with an effort at sternness.

"Only a little, because you read your letter to me," he answered.

"I did not, sir," playfully.

"I can prove it to you."

"Then tell me what I read."

"Something sad at first, then something unexpected and distressing, then you became mystified, and ended in mystifying me."

"Did you catch the names?"

"No; oh, no," laughing. "But you'll tell me."

"Do you remember of reading to us last week an account of a railroad accident in Penn?"

"Yes."

"One of the unfortunate men who were killed was the husband of an old friend of mine."

"Ah!"

"Poor Nina! she is rapidly becoming acquainted with life's saddest phases."

"Miss Stella, excuse me, but I have thought sometimes that you are hiding a sorrow. Have you any trouble?"

"It is the common lot of mortals, Mr. Martin."

"But yours, Miss Stella, is not of the ordinary kind."

"You are imaginative."

"No, but you do not choose to confide in me."

"I have nothing to confide, Mr. Martin. That is, nothing but what I can bear alone."

"There is something, then, and I ask your confidence, Miss Stella. I ask it as one who would spare you this sorrow, whatever it may be; as one who would be nearer now than a friend."

And there in the gathering shadows he told her the old story ever new. His words were full of earnestness and pathos and pleading; but there was no answering response from the quivering heart whose sad lot it had been to bury its wealth of affection from human sight. Because she owed him this explanation she told him briefly her story, how that her affections were not her own to give.

"But I will wait, oh, how patiently, until time will work a change in your heart. You are not promised, and I could live on that," he entreated.

Full of the deepest pity for him she answered,

"Mr. Martin, my dear friend, I am sorry for you, more than I can tell. Why do we all love so strangely, so unfortunately! I cannot bid you hope, for my feelings will never change, and I never expect to marry." In vain he sought to alter her determination. "I have the utmost respect for you, Mr. Martin," was the most she could say. "I am surprised and pained to have unwittingly caused you such a disappointment. I know what it is to love unwisely. Do not think me unsympathetic because I assure you that it is better

that you suffer now than that you should make the terrible mistake of uniting your life to one whose love yon can never claim." As soon as she could without abruptness, she closed the interview that had given no promise of such a termination at its beginning, and with hurried footsteps fled to the seclusion of her own room, and locking the door sank down on the floor and uttered the passionate cry, "Oh, Morgan, my love, my love! I thought I was learning to forget you when I had only lulled the longings of my heart to sleep!"

She pressed both hands to her throbbing head, arose, walked to the window, and kneeling down before it laid her burning cheek against the pane. She heeded not the footsteps of the multitude that hurried by, the rich and the lowly, the light-hearted and the oppressed as they walked beneath the window where lay the heart-stricken girl, who, almost within arm's length of them was as solitary and isolated as regards her grief as though she were alone in the great large city.

Then there came a timid rap at the door. She arose and opened it, shielded by the darkness. It was Helen, one of her little pupils, that spoke,

"Please, Miss Stella, may I come in?"

"Yes, dear."

"Why, you haven't lit the gas, Miss Stella. Shall I light it for you?"

"No, Helen, the firelight is very pleasant."

The child came close and laid her cheek affectionately against her teacher's face, as she had often done before, and, feeling the traces of tears, said, surprisedly,

"Why, Miss Stella, you have been crying; I feel the tears on your face."

"Do you, dear?"

"Yes. I didn't think you ever cried. Have we

done anything to hurt your feelings, Miss Stella? Have I?"

"No, Helen, you are a very good little girl, and I love you very much."

"Then why do you cry?" persisted the child.

"We all have something to make us cry, sometime, Helen."

"Good people, too; that love God?"

"Yes, dear, good people, too, have sorrows."

"But Miss Stella, you told me the other day that God only allows his people to have such troubles as are best for them to have, and that He will make everything right after a while."

"And so He will, dear," with a sigh.

"You love God, don't you, Miss Stella?"

"Yes."

"Then if He sends you trouble, isn't it all right? Why, Miss Stella," and the child in the innocence and simplicity of her heart, laughed at the very idea, "if you know that somebody who loves you caused something unpleasant to happen, and that He knows what is best for you better than you do, I can't see how you can call it much trouble after all. And I heard you say that He'll make all the ugly places smooth, although we do not understand how."

She was startled at the child's crude philosophy and asked,

"What makes you talk this way, Helen?"

"I don't know, Miss Stella, I just didn't understand why you were crying, when God knows all about your trouble, and only sends what is best. Have I worried you?"

"Oh, no, dear, you have comforted me. I had lost sight of the loving hand, and had only thought of the chastening rod."

"I don't understand you, Miss Stella."

"I mean, my dear, that I will try hereafter to think of the goodness of God, and not of my petty trials."

Certainly the little one was teaching her teacher a lesson on the literalness of faith. And so she sat there, talking her sweet, innocent talk until Stella's thoughts were turned into happier channels. When she told her it was bed-time, and the loving child kissed her good-night and tripped off to her own room, Stella knelt by her bedside in perfect composure, and said, "My Father, I thank Thee that Thou canst give me strength sufficient for every trial, and that Thy loving hand dost control every event of my life. Renew again my faith, Oh, Father, and daily direct my feeble footsteps. Help me from my heart to say, 'Thy will be done,' no matter how thorny the path may be, so it leads to a blissful haven at last!"

It is no wonder that Philip Martin, with a susceptible human heart, could not live under the same roof with this girl for a year and more without loving her. And although her coming into the family has been to him only a source of disappointment, yet in these months she has made such impressions for good on the minds of these young children as will never be obliterated in time nor eternity. There was no embarrassment in the friendly, "Good morning" that passed between Philip and Stella the next morning when they met in the breakfast room; and before a week he went abroad on business for his father, to be absent from home several months. But before the time of his absence expired, Stella received a letter from her brother stating that her father was sick, and at once she determined to go home. There was nothing alarming in the letter, but she felt that she must go.

In communicating her decision to Mrs. Martin, she added, "You must not think that I have no feeling at leaving you. You have been so kind to me, every one of you, that I love you all dearly. And I have been happy here, happier than I expected to be anywhere. Believe me, Mrs. Martin, I shall ever hold you and your kind family in grateful remembrance. Duty calls me away. Mother does not tell me to come, yet I know she needs me."

The children were loud in their grief when they found that Miss Stella was going to leave them, but she kissed them into quietness, and ere the day arrived for her to go, they had learned to look upon it as the very best plan, because she said so.

Harry Elton appointed himself a committee of one to see her safely home, and after many affectionate adieux and much kindly advice they started. While in the car Stella handed to Mr. Elton the letter she had received bearing the intelligence of Mr. Miller's death and Mrs. Preston's. He read it through, and handing it back, said,

"Strange I did not hear of Mrs. Preston's death. Her husband will be lonely."

That was all. Not even the slightest change of countenance. "Pride, not forgetfulness," commented Stella, inwardly, "and I do not blame him."

Her father was much better when she arrived, and all were delighted to have Stella at home again.

CHAPTER XXII.

"It cannot be that earth is man's only abiding place. It cannot be that our life is a bubble cast up by the ocean of eternity, to float another moment upon its surface, and then sink into nothingness and darkness forever. Else why is it that the high and glorious aspirations which leap like angels from the temples of our hearts are forever wandering abroad dissatisfied?

"Why is it that the rainbow and the cloud come over us with a beauty that is not of earth, and then pass off and leave us to muse on their faded loveliness?

"Why is it that the stars which hold their festival around the midnight throne are set above the grasp of our limited faculties, and are forever mocking us with their unapproachable glory?

"Why is it that bright forms of human beauty are presented to the view, and then taken from us, leaving the thousand streams of the affections to flow back in an Alpine torrent upon our hearts?

"We are born for a higher destiny than that of earth. There is a realm where the rainbow never fades, where the stars will be spread out before us like the islands that slumber on the ocean; and where the beautiful beings that here pass before us like visions will stay in our presence forever!"

GEORGE D. PRENTICE.

"Blessed are they that are homesick, for they shall come at last to the Father's house." STILLINGS.

"DR. PRESTON is more morose and taciturn than ever," was the universal comment by his friends when he returned again to Chicago and his medical practice. Yet his patients were wonderfully glad to see him for all that. His noiseless footstep, gentle voice and kindly smile were all harbingers of health to them. He had not entered upon his profession without mature deliberation, and being a constant student and careful practitioner he was very successful, and was building up for himself a reputation and a name. There was

one thing very uncomfortable about him though to gossips and those in general who have a weakness for prying into other people's private affairs. He was very reticent. Absolutely no one could be found who was able to furnish the gossips with any information in regard to his personal affairs, his family or his circumstances. Conjecture did what she could, but except with professional busy-bodies she is an unsatisfactory agent. So he pursued the even tenor of his way, silent, shut up within himself, content to let the world think what it pleased, while he satisfied his own conscience as to duty; and in this unyielding, straightforward way he made friends at every turn in spite of himself.

In vain young ladies wasted on him their pretty graces. There was no tremor in the cool, soft fingers that lay professionally upon the plump, pulsing wrist of youth and beauty, nor unwonted color in the handsome face that scans the lovely features of some attractive invalid who would willingly risk a few weeks of physical pain for the sake of winning the attention of this quiet, grave, fascinating man. But finding that he could not be taken by storm nor strategy, the young ladies pronounced him invulnerable, and—let him alone. In the quiet of his study, locked in securely from the outer world, and all its meddling and curiosity and self-interest and tumult, Dr. Preston threw off this impenetrable repose of manner, and in all the utter abandonment of a child wept over his griefs and sorrows, and battled with the yearnings of his disappointed heart. He had secretly kept the promise made to his dying mother, to read the Word of God and to pray. Still, to him, spiritual things are enshrouded in mystery, and he scarcely knows how to pray. To him "God is a consuming fire,"—a being invested with

awful majesty and power, dealing in law and justice, but not in mercy, and *so* distant from him when he tried to pray. His father, good and kind, had not the tact to appreciate his son's need, and he longed for the gentle mother now happy in the paradise of God. And he had promised her to read this book, hallowed by the touch of her fingers and the breath of her prayers, and and to pray, and he did it every day he lived, but God seemed so far off. Thus months rolled away, and Dr. Preston is more ill at ease than ever. He feels his burden of guilt more sensibly, but he cannot easily undo the work of former years. He cannot clear away the mists of delusive ideas gathered from years of false teaching so as to fully take, in all its deep meaning, the vision of the cross.

Late one night he came into his study tired in body and particularly depressed in spirits. He had been called to see a child, a very bright and interesting boy of eight or ten years who had been stricken down with a malignant fever. The child was beyond hope when he arrived, and he stayed with him until he died; then restored the fainting mother to consciousness, and after making her as comfortable as possible, and seeing that everything was attended to for the dead, he left them. Entering his room he locked the door, sat down before the fire, and dropped his head in his hands in an attitude of utter weariness. After a while a murmured prayer came from between his lips.

"Oh, God! holy and just, Thou sendest Thine afflictions like rain upon Thy people, and Thou art terrible in Thy justice. Oh, that Thou would'st reveal unto me Thy love and mercy. God pity me, for I am full of sorrow and there is no joy in my life." He opened his mother's Bible and his eyes fell on the eighth verse of the second chapter of Ephesians, "For

by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves ; it is the gift of God." He fell down upon his knees, and in the fullness of his heart cried, "Oh, God ! I pray Thee, give me this saving faith. I know not what it is, but it is the gift of God. I know not how to approach Thee as I ought, but teach me." The depth of his nature was stirred and he wept like a grieved child. "Oh, I pray Thee, for the sake of Thy Blessed Son, and my own precious mother, whose dying lips breathed a prayer for me, give unto me this faith that will enable me to trust Thy word. Oh, Father, if indeed I may call Thee by so endearing a name, show unto me the loving side of Thy character. Not that I merit it. I am not worthy that Thou shouldst notice me, but, oh, forgive. I cannot dissemble before Thee. Thou knowest I am a grief-stricken man full of sorrow, at sea without chart or compass ; and, oh, I beseech Thee, as I never did before, remember the sufferings and death of Thy Blessed Son, and for His sake break the fetters that have held me captive for so long, and speak peace to my wretched heart !" He laid his Bible on the chair before him and opened it, still kneeling. Was it the finger of she who had promised to be his guardian angel that pointed to these words? "For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee ; behold now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation." He was startled as he read the text and began to comprehend its deep meaning. "Is that true?" he asked himself, "are these words meant for me? Now?" Lifting his eyes to heaven he prayed, "Father, help me to believe it. Am I *now* redeemed from the thraldom of sin? I, who have been the chief of sinners?" There came a sudden light into his mind, and it formed itself

into this idea, "God can save me now as well as at any other time. All He asks is a broken and contrite spirit. He reads my heart and knows that I do sincerely repent of my sins, and am truly sorry for having led the Godless life that I have. I can do nothing more. My Saviour did all the rest on Calvary I believe that He hears me. I feel a strange Presence in my heart. He comforts me and blots out all my hideous transgressions. My Father, my Saviour, I thank Thee!"

And thus did Dr. Preston, alone in the stillness of the night, realize for the first time "that peace of God which passeth all understanding." His prayer was now no longer one of supplication, but of thanksgiving and praise. Long he knelt there, communing with God and his own heart, and praying for guidance and wisdom so to live that this new-found peace, this hope of eternal life, now so strong within him, might never be taken away. Rising from his knees he took up the Bible as it still lay open before him, and read again the verse that had so strangely enabled him to make a personal application of the love and mercy of God to his own heart, then read on to the end of the chapter. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel."

Now ye profound theologians, pardon this young man, *so* young in spiritual things, if he gives to this passage a literalness that you argue does not belong to it. And think it not strange, dear reader, if in this important crisis in his life his thoughts revert to that other, only less important. Oftimes we count our

lines by crises—not by days and years. And so he soliloquized,

"Why, I never knew before that such words were in the Bible. Yes, she was right. I can see it now. I was no fit companion for her. And rude and unreasonable, I would not accept the promise that she so magnanimously offered me. Well, the Lord who is able to lift the enormous weight of sin from my soul that I carried for so many years, is able to strengthen me now, and will help me to bear my punishment, and live my lonely life to the end."

It was near daylight when with a peaceful mind and weary body he lay down to rest. This new life on which he was entering required but few outward changes from Dr. Preston's habitual conduct. His life, so far as the rules of morality were concerned, needed no outer changing. The difference was all in the inner life. Now a calm and peaceful light shone from his clear, blue eyes instead of the restless, hungry soul that looked out before. He had not flaunted his atheistical opinions, and not many of his friends knew that he entertained them. Being constantly thrown with the afflicted, sorrowing and oftentimes dying, in his extensive practice, he was now enabled to minister both to physical and spiritual nature. Many times it became his exalted privilege, as well as duty, to point the dying to the Lamb of God. This he did with clearness and directness, and with that humility which characterizes the man who remembers the horrible pit from which he himself has been rescued. Days and weeks slipped by, filled with unremitting toil, and blest and brightened by the smile of an approving and reconciled Saviour. The desire grew strong within him to see his native hills again in the gladness of springtime, and her whose tiny, pictured face had lain so near

his heart all these days and months and years. Not that he hoped for anything more than a recognition, but his heart clamored loudly for one more glimpse of her ere he settled down to his life-work; and, if possible, an opportunity to tell her that he was in Christ a new creature. As he soon found out this was not easily accomplished. He was busy day and night, and there seemed really no chance for him to leave his field of labor. So he yielded to duty, and his trip was postponed from day to day until spring was nearly over. But at last there came a time when he was allowed a short furlough, so he and his father took the eastern bound train, speeding away toward Maryland.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MOURNFUL rhyme had been present in Stella McMurray's mind all day, and she had repeatedly said to herself, "Why am I sad to-day?" The sun shone brightly, and there was naught in her home but peace and love. And more than all, she had heard news this morning that made her unmistakably glad. Yet was her heart heavy, and the spirits of the past that came trooping through her soul, brought only unrest and a dull hard pain. Taking down her garden hat she slipped out of the house, and stealthily, as though afraid of detection, hurried down the foot-path across the hill, and breathless arrived at the old trysting-place, the low rock in the brook. She had not been here for more than two years. Not once since the day *he* parted with her in anger; and she longed to see the spot again, and read right here that which had made her glad this morning. Taking a letter from her

pocket (it was from Mr. Elton), she opened it, and after glancing over several paragraphs, read, "I was at Mr. Martin's a few days ago. They were eager in their inquiries after your welfare. Phil came home from the West a week ago. He met with an old friend of ours in Chicago, Morgan Preston, M.D. And would you believe it, Stella? He has embraced religion, and has become a zealous, active Christian. All things are possible with God." "My Father, I thank Thee," was all that her full heart uttered. But in spite of this intelligence her face was sad. It is not the ruddy, happy countenance that met us here two years ago. Instead of the merry song she sang then, now the wailing of her heart is—

"Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, Oh, sea!
But the tender voice of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

But the brook babbles on as it did before, heedless of the dark days that have come between the Then and the Now.

This morning there were two new arrivals in the neighborhood, Dr. Preston and his father. Their first duty was at the churchyard. Here the morning was spent in dressing and adorning the little heap of earth that covered the form of wife and mother. At the head a pure white marble stone bore the inscription: "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Their labor of love being finished, Dr. Preston decided within himself to seek out some of his old haunts before venturing to make a formal call upon Miss McMurray, if perchance she would see him. Strange that his footsteps should lead him almost unconsciously to the very spot where

he had wooed and lost two years ago. And stranger still, when he reached the place that, there right before him, as though the past was but a dream and he was just awakening, stood Stella, in almost the very spot where he had found her two years ago. As then she did not notice his approach, but was silently looking down into the water. When he saw her all the strong love of his heart rose up within him, struggling for expression, but recollecting too well the circumstances under which they had parted, his lips only uttered doubtingly the single word "Stella!" She started at sound of that voice, and turning saw someone—was it *he?* His full beard disguised him somewhat, but he had removed his hat, and the wavy brown hair was the same, and the general contour of face. She looked at him for an instant then faltered out tremblingly, "Morgan." He read the glad look in her eyes, came nearer, and forgetful of pre-determined discretionary measures, held out his arms and said,

"Stella, God has forgiven me. Can you?"

She placed both hands within his, while a happy sigh fluttered up from heart, and this was all the answer she made. So the past was bridged over with a regret and a sigh and a pæan of praise, and two happy souls walked slowly back to the old house over the hill. Mrs. McMurray saw them coming, but she did not recognize the stranger until he came to the threshold, and spoke to her saying, still holding Stella's hand within his arm,

"Mrs. McMurray is there room in your motherly heart for another son?"

She rose to her feet, lifted her hands in amazement, the habitual knitting fell to the floor, and she said,

"Why, Morgan, I don't know. I hain't had no warnin'. But I suppose I might just as well say yes

to it, and be done with it, for ye look like ye had it made up between ye."

This seemed satisfactory, and as soon as the first shock of surprise was over, and the good old lady had steered the unexpected guest into the parlor, with Stella to entertain, she went into the kitchen again, and stooping down gathered up her knitting, and as she picked up the row of dropped stitches, delivered herself thus,

"Did I ever in all my born days? I as soon expected to see a ghost as Morgan Preston. Ain't it queer how things will work around? They've been a pinin' for each other nigh unto three year—Stella and Morgan has. My, my! How times has changed since father an' I was courtin'. I mind when he asked me to marry him. We wuz walkin' across the pastur-field one moonlight night comin' home from a quiltin' at Farmer Jones's. I told him 'yes' right then and there. He was a good, sober, stiddy fellow, and I didn't see no use parleyin' about it. So I left the old folks for him, and now our children are doing the same thing. Well, well, we'll have to give 'em up some time, but it's mighty hard to let Stella go all the way out there to Chicago."

A suspicious moisture gathered in her eyes which she wiped away with the corner of her apron.

To condense a long conversation into a few sentences, and thus to hurry to the close, we will say that when Dr. Preston came again on the following evening he succeded in gaining Stella's consent to a speedy marriage. She did not wish to be so hasty, but he would not hear any proposition that included his returning to Chicago without her.

Her parents yielded a reluctant consent, and they were to be married in a month, he staying at home

during the time, although his term of absence was limited to a week when he left the city.

So it became a busy time in the McMurray homestead. Only four weeks until the wedding day, and so much to be done. Two dressmakers were actively employed in the house on the wedding outfit. Yet Mrs. McMurray is quite dissatisfied with what they can accomplish in so short a time. The large dining-room seems too small for the extensive business that is being carried on within it. Cutting and fitting, stitching and talking. Silk fabrics, almost rich enough to stand alone, lay strewn on one table, on another a travelling dress of soft, gray stuff, and piles of white material, boxes of buttons and laces, and cording and oraids, until there was hardly a comfortable path in the room. In the midst of all this confusion one of the ladies glanced out of the window, then turning to Stella said in a teasing tone,

"Well, if there isn't Dr. Preston. It's a pity he couldn't stay away until afternoon and let us have the morning in peace. Lock the door, Fanny."

But this command came too late, for the intruder was already in the room.

"Well, ladies," he said, pleasantly, "this looks like business, I'm sure," stepping first this way and then that to keep from treading on some delicate fabric. "Don't let me interrupt you," he continued, as he finally worked his way to a vacant chair at the further end of the room. Here one of the ladies took occasion to remark to another in reference to his last exclamation, in a whisper loud enough to be heard all over the room,

"Observe, he doesn't wish this matter to be delayed."

"'Full many a shaft at random sent,
Finds mark the archer little meant.'"

he quoted, laughing with the rest. Then taking a letter from his pocket he gave it to Stella, saying, "This was handed me for you this morning, and how could I be expected to know that it wasn't highly important that you should receive it at once."

It was from Harry Elton, the faithful friend, a pleasant letter, congratulating her on the happy turn affairs had taken. She read it, and handed it to Dr. Preston, while a shadow gathered over her face.

"Very pleasant and complimentary," he commented, when he had finished reading. "Certainly there is nothing in it to cause the clouds to gather over your face, Stella, but there they are."

She laughed, thus dispelling them, and answered,

"My face is telling tales again. I should have it under better control. But I'll tell you about it this evening. And in the meantime, with many thanks for your kindness in bringing the letter, I'm going to send you home."

"'"Twas ever thus since childhood's hour,'" he retorted. "But I suppose I must submit to the 'powers that be.'"

Stella went out on the porch with him, talked a few moments, then he bowed himself off.

CHAPTER XXIX.

In the evening when they were sitting together in the parlor, Stella said to him, "Morgan, I promised to tell you about my cloudy face, did I not? Well, while reading Harry's pleasant letter, I thought how

sad his lot in life, while he is congratulating me upon my happy one. I wish he could be made as happy as we."

"So do I, sincerely," was the reply. "But we can do absolutely nothing to right the wrong."

"Do you think now that Nina ever really loved him?"

"Certainly, I do."

"Perhaps if they were to meet again it would result in an amicable adjustment of their former difficulties."

"I doubt it, dearie; Nina is terribly unyielding."

"Surely, Morgan, in all these years she has learned that she was mistaken in her estimate of Mr. Elton's character. At any rate this is a clear proposition, unless they do meet again, a reconciliation is utterly impossible."

He laughed as he replied,

"And each of them would avoid such a catastrophe as they would an interview with a cannibal."

"Morgan, it must be brought about. Cannot you devise a plan in which every particular need not be explained?"

"Never ask a man to contrive a scheme, if there is a woman in the case."

"I'll tell you what I thought of to-day. Simply this: of inviting Nina to our wedding. What do you think of it? Of course Henry'll be here. Then don't you see what the result might be?"

"In the first place I think Nina will mildly but firmly refuse to come. And neither will he run the risk of meeting her."

"He shall not know that I have invited her."

"Don't you think she will suspect a plot?"

"No; you wouldn't if you didn't know there was one."

"But ladies are more suspicious and wary than we are," smilingly. Stella brought her writing-desk, sat down and dashed off a letter to Nina, then gave it to him to mail for her the next day. After the first preliminaries it ran thus: "Accompanying this you will receive cards to my wedding. For the sake of our olden love and friendship, come. We are going away shortly after our marriage, and you and I may probably not see each other again for years. Morgan (of course, it is understood that it is he I am going to marry, whom you have exalted to the skies many times for my edification), joins me in this invitation extra, and is very urgent that you should come. I am not prepared to accept a refusal. Let your coming be as soon as convenient for you."

The answer impatiently waited for came in due time. She was coming; would arrive several days before the one set apart for the celebration of the nuptials. She came. Dr. Preston met her at the station, and brought her over to Mr. McMurray's where she was warmly welcomed. She looked much the same, only her expression was a little more care-worn, and less animated than before.

All things have an end and so did the few brief days intervening between Nina's coming and Stella's marriage. The dresses were finished and laid away, and everything was in readiness for the occasion. For a week Mrs. McMurray had been in a state of continual excitement over the culinary department, laboring under the hallucination that something would be sure to go wrong. They were expecting a large company, and everything must be perfect, or the dear woman would go distracted. The country had been ran-

sacked for butter that wasn't "garlicky" for the cakes; and then after every possible precaution was taken in their composition, and they were beaten until every arm in the house ached, the good lady still lived in momentary dread for fear they would be heavy, until she saw them, one by one, taken from the oven as light and delicious as could be desired to gratify an epicurean taste. The turkeys, also, had to undergo a rigid *cross*-examination for fear they were not fat and juicy and tender, but at last the requisite number were found that promised satisfaction. So, in due time, everything was in readiness, and nothing remained to give Mrs. McMurray uneasiness.

The evening came, lamps were lighted, the company arrived, and the rooms were filled. Kind reader, this crude story has been what it advertised itself to be from the start, a simple story of country life, and now in the *denouement*, we have a simple, unpretentious, substantial country wedding. This is all we claim for it. So you will not expect to read of an orchestra hidden away among banks of flowers, furnishing entrancing music, and a reporter in the background to describe the magnificent toilettes of the distinguished lady guests; and a poor, impoverished papa, *not reported*, inwardly groaning over the fact that daughter's wedding expenses, so much greater than he had anticipated, must be met either *by fair means or foul*. Nothing of the kind. There is not the least effort at display. But hearts are sweetly content, and this is one of the marriages upon which God smiles. The first to enter the room where the ceremony will be performed, are the minister and his wife. The same faithful minister who had been with Dr. Preston's mother in her last triumphant moments, and who had been the first to grasp his hand and say, "God bless

you and keep you faithful," when he told him that those prayers were answered and he had passed "from death unto life." Then entered Mr. and Mrs. McMurray, Mr. Preston, Sr., and his niece, Mrs. Miller; Stella's brothers, two by two, then Dr. Preston, the hero of the hour, with his chosen bride leaning confidingly upon his arm. Truly beautiful she looked in her bridal dress, a mist of white fleecy stuff, caught up here and there with orange blossoms, and her glossy curls gleaming out from among the folds of her misty white veil. In a few moments the vows were spoken which made them husband and wife. Among the first to congratulate and kiss the smiling lips of the beautiful bride was Harry Elton.

"I am glad to see you, Harry. When did you come?" she asked.

"Only a little while ago," he replied.

But there was no time for conversation until the congratulations were acknowledged and the company seated. Then Mr. Elton came forward, and in a moment was talking in his old, easy way, now with Dr. Preston, now with his bride.

"Stella, you look uncommonly pretty this evening," came out in his old natural way; then, "But that was a blunder. I forgot to address you as Mrs. Preston."

"Thank you," Stella answered, smiling; but her husband said,

"As you and—*my wife*"—this in an undertone—"have been such dear and intimate friends for so long, I will not circumscribe you now. So compliment her as much as you please, sir, and I will endorse all you say."

"And when I compliment your wife," was the laughing rejoinder, "I want you to understand, sir,

that I hold a grudge against you personally, and in behalf of her friends for taking her so far away from us."

"I can prescribe a remedy, Mr. Elton, that will soothe your wounded feelings as nothing else will. Just follow my example."

"Tush, Morgan. Don't strike a fellow when he's down. You know I was born for an old bach, and I expect to fulfil my destiny to the letter. I asked this very little piece of femininity here at your side once to marry me, and she not only said, emphatically, 'No,' but laughed in my face. That's the sort of luck I've had in my matrimonial speculations."

"And you laughed as merrily as I did," Stella retorted. "If I had said 'Yes,' Harry, you would have been the most discomfited fellow imaginable. What *would* you have done?"

"Sent for the parson," was the ready reply, and in the laughter that followed he moved away to make room for others who wanted a word with the bride and groom, who were now being lionized for the first time in their lives. After a while Dr. Preston whispered to Stella,

"I am afraid your little *ruse* will not work."

There, opposite to them, in solitary grandeur sat Nina Miller, looking pale, weary and listless, glancing at different faces in the room. Several paces removed from her, engaged in an animated conversation with the handsomest girl in the room, stood Harry Elton, laughing gaily at the sharp sallies of wit the girl threw out so cleverly.

"Never mind," answered Stella, still hopeful, "something *may* occur yet that will enable us to capture that polar bear over yonder," pointing to Nina. "It is all her fault."

"But look at him. He doesn't seem at all disconcerted."

"Why should he? Who *would* approach such frigidity as that? She isn't like herself to-night. Before he came she was very agreeable, now she is a towering iceberg. But I will still hope for melting influences."

Agreeably to his friends' earnest solicitations, Mr. Elton consented to remain with them until they should leave for Chicago, which would be in a few days. During this interval Mr. Elton and Mrs. Miller met daily, almost hourly, decided between themselves whether the weather was fine or stormy, always satisfactorily to both parties, talked a little on other equally important subjects in the most freezingly polite manner, but beyond this took no notice of each other. Stella's hopes were fast fading. If she casually (?) left them together to entertain each other, in a little while sometimes one, sometimes the other, would make some trifling excuse and leave the room. So there was nothing left for her to do but sit calmly by and inwardly bemoan the audacity of the one and the stubborness of the other. It was the afternoon before the day set for their departure, and these two were as far apart as the poles. But the "consummation so devoutly to be wished" was brought about in a way entirely unexpected by them all. Dr. Preston, with his father and Mr. Elton had gone out for a drive; and on their return, when nearing home, the horses, being young and spirited, took fright, became unmanageable, and turning suddenly in the road, overturned the vehicle and threw them all out. Dr. Preston still held the reins securely, and with great strength and presence of mind succeeded comparatively soon in checking the animals, and after securing them went

back to the place where his father, unhurt, knelt over the insensible form of their friend. In falling his head struck the sharp edge of a milestone which stood on the roadside, and here he lay unconscious with the blood streaming from an ugly gash in his forehead. Dr. Preston was alarmed when he first saw him, but upon examination found that the wound was not necessarily dangerous, and after binding up the forehead with his handkerchief, he and his father righted up the carriage, gently placed him in it, and drove the remaining part of the distance home; then placed him on the sofa in the parlor. Stella and her mother were terribly frightened when they brought him in, but Morgan quieted their fears by telling them that he did not think Mr. Elton seriously hurt; and he at once applied restoratives.

"Now," thought Stella, "is my time if ever. If I cannot storm the citadel at midday, I'll surprise the garrison at night. If this doesn't move her, I'll give her up." So saying to herself she ran hurriedly upstairs to her room where Nina was, and rushing in, her face still white from recent fright, said, impetuously, "Nina, do you know that Harry Elton is terribly hurt?"

The woman sprang to her feet, and coming nearer, said excitedly.

"What did you say?"

"There's been an accident, Nina." Then in a manner better calculated to increase alarm than to allay it, she continued, "The horses ran away and Mr. Elton is injured. But sit down, don't be alarmed, perhaps, he—well, he's lying on the sofa insensible."

Nina Miller waited to hear no more, but rushing down stairs and into the parlor with a face as white as death, she fell on her knees beside the unconscious

man, took his head in her arms, pushed back the hair all matted with blood, laid her cheek against his colorless face and moaned,

"Oh, my darling, my darling!"

The sunlight of love has melted the iceberg. Seeing faint but unmistakable signs of returning consciousness, Dr. Preston and his father walked reverently from the room, leaving this woman alone with her love and her grief. It is no wonder that Harry Elton did not at once comprehend the situation when he opened his eyes to consciousness. At first his expression was only of glad surprise, then noticing her face all bathed in tenderness and tears, he doubtingly asked the question,

"What is it, Mrs. Miller?"

"You have been terribly injured, Harry, but I fervently pray that you may not die."

"And if I live, Nina, what then?"

We will not repeat her answer, but it was perfectly satisfactory. Dr. Preston, upon leaving the room, ran lightly upstairs, and placing his arms about his wife who still stood doubtfully in the middle of the floor, said, "It's all right, dearie. Allow me to congratulate you upon the perfect success of your scheme. Harry would be willing to risk a dozen upsettings like that for the sake of the love that woman is showering upon him now."

"And he isn't badly hurt?"

"Oh, no, he'll be all right in a few days."

"I'm truly thankful."

Mrs. McMurray was transfixed with astonishment, when, on entering the parlor with a bowl of water and a linen cloth to bathe and bind up the wound, she came upon, not her son-in-law, but Mrs. Miller, tenderly supporting the injured man, and looking as

though she had secured a bona-fide right so to do. Mrs. McMurray meekly handed over her credentials to this new usurper and left the room. And as she closed the door this good lady was heard to say,

"Well, this beats my time! I don't understand the young folks now a days at all. 'Pears to me that the more they love each other the contrarier they are. Here this proud, headstrong woman has been a takin' about as much notice of Harry Elton as if he'd been a tree-frog, and now because she's afeard he's a goin' to die, she's down off her stilts in a hurry, and sidin' up to him, all gentle and tender as a lamb, and ten to one if she ain't just as good as promised to marry him. Well, I never!"

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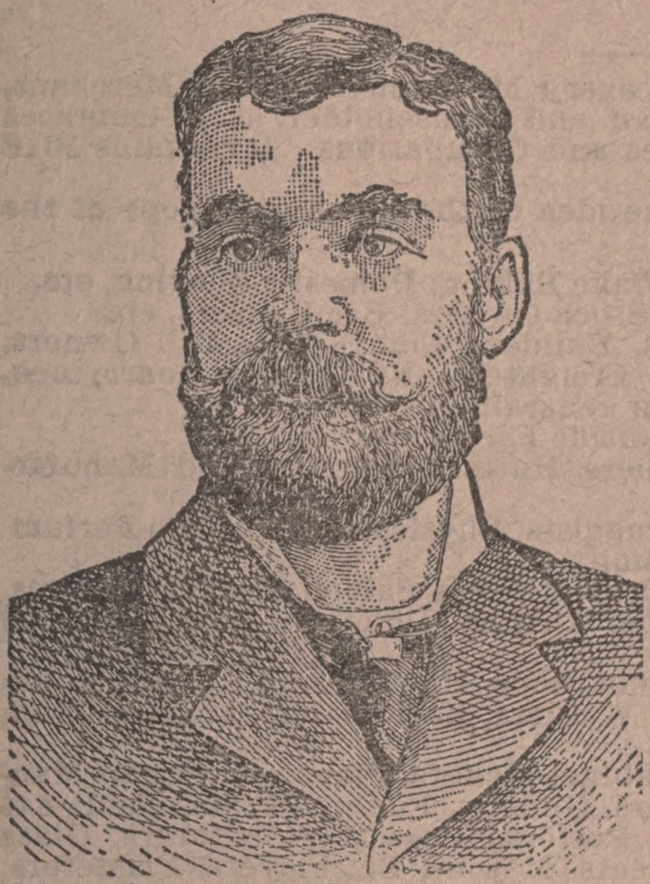

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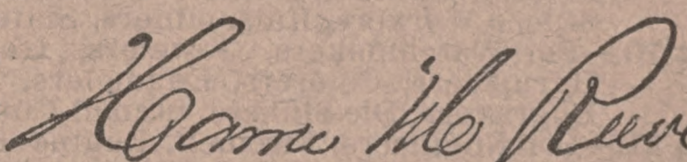

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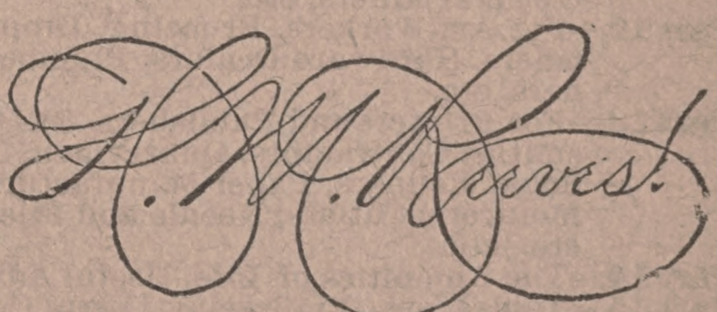

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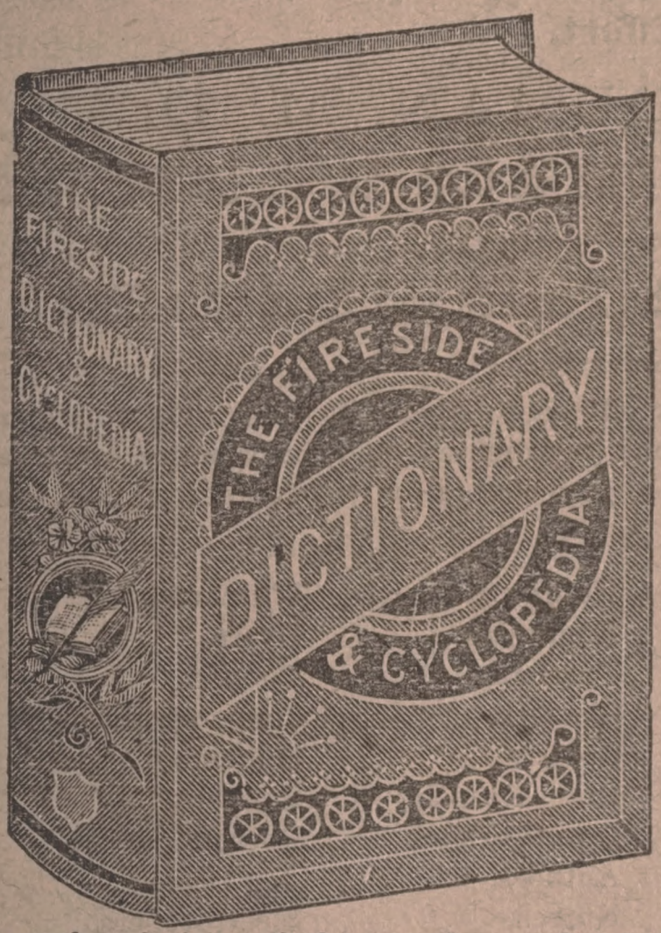

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